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Death Wears a Silk Stocking

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Death Wears a Silk Stocking

by

W. MURDOCH DUNCAN



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TO MY FATHER—
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CHAPTER ONE

SELWYN, SEVENTH LORD CINNAFORD AND BARON SELLINGTON, WAS AN oddly attractive young man who stood seventy inches in his socks. He was not handsome in the classical sense, for his nose had once been broken in a bar-room brawl, and his features had been broadened by a somewhat short pugilistic career. Not even Marion Campbell, who wore the Cinnaford diamond on her finger, could liken him to the Apollo Belvedere, or to any of the other extremely handsome gentlemen of Greek mythology.

And yet, by all standards, she herself was beautiful. A slim dream of a girl whose eyes were grey and whose lips crinkled up into laughter at the slightest of provocations.

Kelman always said that she had a 'hairtrigger laugh', and he was not far wrong in this, for the potent devil of perpetual merriment lay ever in the grey pools of her eyes.

Kelman was a handsome man himself, with his silvering hair and his dark, straight eyebrows, his fresh complexion and his clean-cut features. He was an American, of course, and that of all things endeared him to Cinnaford, for that aristocratic young man had spent the best years of his life in the States, and sometimes wished that he had remained there, for Selwyn St. David was a man of parts.

At twenty he had been a sailor. At twenty-five he had been fighting for a year as a professional boxer. Not a good one, as he frequently admitted—but for all that, able to earn his keep. Fate and a distaste for weekly pummellings had led him to abandon this vocation, and he had drifted to Detroit. Here he had attached himself to the staff of the *Tribune*, and in three years he was their star reporter.

He could not write!

He had found this out very quickly. But he had a nose for news and a flair for discovering strange customs, and his fame grew. Coleman, his boss, once said of him: "He's not intellectual—he's clever. If there is a story, he'll find it. If it's a good story, he'll find it first. How does he do it? Instinct, I suppose. He's got that sort of extra sense that a good newspaper man needs to have."

And the balance of probability is that he was correct in this estimate, for although Coleman was a cold, callous man in whom all the wells of kindness and charity had dried up, he was a competent judge of newspaper-men and had not one illusion left.

Selwyn had few himself. When the rather fragile old lawyer had arrived at his dingy Cass Avenue apartment to tell him that his cousin Martin St. David, sixth Earl of Cinnaford, had crashed to his death at Brooklands, and that he was heir to the Lands of Cinnaford and Sellington, his first impulse was to show him the door, for he suspected,

and not without reason, the humour of one Jim Brophey, the instigator of many hoaxes.

But Mr. Ponder had come prepared, for he was armed with documentary proof of his status, and there was no doubt at all that he was the New York representative of Truett, Tellett, Horner and Skeffington, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the story that he told was interesting enough to make Selwyn listen.

Chance had brought him the title. When he had come to New York ten years before there had been three claimants between himself and the magnificence of Cinnaford, and it had at no time entered his calculations that he should succeed.

Yet the story was comprehensive enough! A shipwreck had carried away the fifth Lord Cinnaford, together with his two-year-old son, and had brought the lands and title to Martin St. David, who had enjoyed them for a brief six months.

The old lawyer had consulted his notes and had talked. Selwyn had listened, dazed at first, then with an increasing surge of excitement. Later on he packed his bags, threw a party in the Book-Cadillac Hotel to which the personnel of the *Tribune* was invited *en masse*. Thereafter he took his leave and came to England, landing at Southampton in time to hear that Hitler had invaded Poland, and that war was inevitable.

He had tried to enlist a week later, and here he found that Fate was not always kind to him. A grim civilian doctor had listened to the beat of his heart and had sent him packing.

He had returned to Cinnaford Chase, shocked and more than a little shaken. That night Kelman had driven over, and because he had had to tell somebody, he had told this friendly man.

Kelman had been sympathetic.

"Bad heart! Angina? Pretty tough, Cinnaford. But don't let it get you down. You've got everything in the world to live for and a fellow in your position doesn't need to worry about not doing his bit. Plenty of scope for you."

"I suppose so," Cinnaford agreed.

Thereafter he had improved his acquaintance with Mr. Kelman, and the world had become a brighter place for him. It was brightest of all on the day that Marion Campbell agreed to wear his ring, yielding to the dual persuasion of Lord Cinnaford himself and Mr. Eldon Spicer, that lover of all that was exclusively English.

He was a large man, Eldon Spicer, and he was her stepfather. More than that, he was a rich man, for he had been wealthy before the discovery of oil on some of his western properties had made him one of the ten richest men in America. And yet for all his wealth he was an approachable man and a plain man, and had all the awe of a plain man for the magnificence which his millions could conjure up.

When he had taken over Grey Lodge, which was on the fringe of Sellington Mere and within the claim temporal of the Lord of Cinnaford Chase, he had had no dreams of future greatness or of an aristocratic son-in-law. Without one base thought he had gone through the

ritual of inspection and lease-signing, and when Cinnaford had proposed to his step-daughter he had inferred his surprise and his consternation. This, at least, had been his story.

Marion, who knew him well, was neither surprised nor consternated. She was a very self-possessed young lady and she had taken him to task in her own manner.

"You're an old humbug, Daddy!" she said.

Spicer was pained.

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"All this talk about not knowing that Selwyn was in love with me. You've known it all along. You've aided and abetted him . . .!"

"Good lord!" said Mr. Spicer. "Did Cinnaford tell you this?"

She nodded. "He practically admitted it. But I'm not blind, Dad. You took Grey Lodge to bring us together. You arranged for him to come over here. You wangled that introduction to Mark Kelman . . .!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Spicer mildly. He was always mildest when he was most taken aback.

"Last night he asked me to marry him," his daughter went on.

"Did you accept him?"

She laughed. "Dear old Dad! I couldn't let you down, could I? Not after all that ingenuity. . . ." She held up her hand. "Do you see that?"

He stared at the solitaire and then back to her eyes. Unaccountably there were tears in them.

"Marion!"

She bent over and kissed him on the cheek. "Of course I'm going to be happy. Selwyn's a pet! But don't ask me any more about it just now. No, I don't know when I'm going to be Lady Cinnaford. Probably not for a little while yet. Anyway, Selwyn's coming over again tonight."

"Is he?" He rubbed his shaven jaw. "We'll have to have a party of sorts, Marion. It's a pity your mother isn't alive. She'd dearly have loved to see this day. Imagine you—Countess of Sellington." He shook his head in admiration. "Not that you aren't good enough for it. You've got class . . . and that's something I never had. Cinnaford's a lucky man and I don't care who hears me say it." He rubbed his hands together. "Let me see that ring again, Marion."

She held out her slim, brown finger.

"Nifty, ain't it?" He shook his head admiringly. "Nothing ikey—nothing flash. Just the sort of thing you'd expect from one of those aristocratic fellows. Probably an heirloom—been in the family for generations, likely."

"To be precise," she said, "he bought it in Cartier's in Bond Street last week." And Mr. Spicer was undeniably crushed. He had a romantic mind, and coupled to this romanticism he had a strong sense of history.

He shook his head.

"There used to be a Cinnaford pearl," he grumbled. "You can't fool me on these sort of things. I read up about it in that book I borrowed from Kelman."

"Mr. Kelman seems to be an authority on Lord Cinnaford," she laughed, and her sober parent nodded.

"Kelman's a clever man. I wouldn't like to have him up against me in a business deal." He shook an admiring head. "That fellow is keen. . . . Ask him about anything and he'll give you an answer. Anyway, this pearl was famous. One of the first. Lord Cinnaford got it from Queen Anne——"

"It sounds like a music-hall joke," the girl said. "I'll have to ask Selwyn about it." She laughed a little. "Or Mr. Kelman. He seems to be the authority."

"Kelman's in London," he said inconsequently. "I saw his car going past the Lodge gates this morning. That fellow is one of the busiest men I know. Aberdeen, Glasgow, Manchester, and in London again—all in the same day. He must have the constitution of a horse."

She sat down and looked into the glowing heart of the fire. The door opened and a footman came in. He lifted four or five lumps of coal on to the fire, brushed away the ash and soot that had collected on the bars of the grate and then retired as silently as he had appeared. Mr. Spicer sighed contentedly.

"That's one of the things I like best about the English. They've got manners. Even the servants. A fellow doesn't have to keep on chasing 'em up to get 'em to work at their job. That old fellow knows his place too. I like men servants. Gives the place a lot of tone."

She laughed. "What an old snob you're turning out to be!"

"Not me!" he protested. "I'm a plain man and I always have been a plain man. Back home in Denver we never were used with a lot of this stuff. But the States are different. You don't expect it there—no atmosphere. If you did come across it you wouldn't like it. England's not like that. That sort of thing has been going on here for centuries. It seems to suit. In another month or two you'll be Lady Cinnaford. 'My lady' this an' 'My lady' that! I can hardly believe it. I remember when you were a little bit of a thing with ribbons in your hair, and now you're practically a countess." He shook his head in admiration. "I'll bet you're the only American girl in the country who could walk into a lord's home like that at the present day. Somehow the day for that sort of marriage has gone out of date."

There was an interruption, for the grey-haired footman came in and announced—"Lord Cinnaford."

Marion got to her feet to welcome him.

Selwyn St. David came into the room, his eyes glowing.

"Afternoon, Marion. How are you, Mr. Spicer?"

The older man said: "Sit down. . . . I want to talk to you. Marion, you can go and arrange for tea or something. Cinnaford and I have a lot to say to each other."

"Of course," she said. Her eyes went to Cinnaford and then she laughed. "Don't let him be too precipitate, Selwyn. Daddy wants to get me off his hands in a hurry."

"Did you ever hear the like?" breathed Spicer. He watched her go out and then a smile broke over his face. "Well, my boy—I'm glad to hear the news. No—you don't need to say a word about it. Marion told me—and I'm pleased. I knew it would happen, but I'm pleased for all that. And you're a lucky man. I tell you that. A lucky man."

Cinnaford leaned back in his chair. He had blue, friendly eyes and just now there was a sparkle in them. His features were good and he smiled easily.

"I'm no end glad myself," he admitted. "It wasn't easy to ask her, sir. You know how it is. It's such a big thing. I didn't know how she'd feel about it, and if she'd said 'No'——"

Spicer chuckled.

"Not much fear of that. The girl's crazy about you. Besides, she knows I like you and that counts a lot with Marion. She's a good girl and she wouldn't want to hurt me." He looked around.

"Where are those cigars?"

There was a silver box on a small table by the window and he rose to his feet. For a second he stood by the window, peering down over the drab, grey-green stretch of the court. And then interest came into his eyes.

"Hello, who is this?"

Cinnaford got up and came across.

"One of the locals, come to pay a call, I suppose." Mr. Spicer lit a cigar and had another look out of the window.

Cinnaford was puzzled. "I hardly think so. That's the station cab, and old Mander is driving it. Someone up from London, most likely."

While he was speaking he saw a slim, girlish figure slip from the antiquated taxi-cab. She spoke to the driver and then ran up the steps that led towards the house.

There was the sound of a bell ringing, and as they sat down by the fire again footsteps came upstairs.

The door opened and Marion came in, and behind her was a slight, pretty girl.

Marion said: "Daddy. This is Miss Elter from New York. A friend of Mr. Kelman's. My father, Mr. Spicer . . . and Lord Cinnaford."

Mr. Spicer was on his feet.

"Come along, Miss Elter. Glad to know you. Any friend of Kelman is welcome here."

Cinnaford drew in a chair and the girl sat down. "I'm so sorry to trouble you," she said, "but I just came from New York by air, and I came to see Mr. Kelman. He's rather a friend of mine—and when I found that he wasn't at home, well, I was rather upset. His house-keeper suggested that you might be able to get in touch for me, and I came straight across here."

Mr. Spicer frowned.

"I'll do my best, Miss Elter. New York, did you say? Used to know a Joseph Elter in New York. He was in the public utilities line of business. You wouldn't know him, eh?"

She smiled. "My father was a policeman."

Cinnaforde chuckled. "I was one myself once. The job lasted for seven months and then it fell through. That was in Camden, New Jersey."

His friendly eyes were on her, and he saw her smile.

Marion said: "Joseph is bringing up tea. You must wait for a little, Miss Elter. Daddy will try to get Mr. Kelman on the telephone. He knows most of his haunts. Come through with me and take your things off."

They went out, and Mr. Spicer watched them go.

"Kelman's got a nice taste in friends," he chuckled. "Been a gay dog, by the look of things."

Cinnaforde shook his head. "I wouldn't think so. That girl could be his daughter. Some business deal, most likely. If she came from the States the chances are all that she came across by 'plane. Possibly she's in his employ."

He stopped speculating, for the girls were coming back again and, coincident with their arrival, came Joseph with a silver tray and tea-things.

Mr. Spicer seldom took tea. He was, he admitted, a little scornful of this custom. Coffee was a different thing. He could drink coffee at any hour of the day or night. Or whisky. He had a little whisky and excused himself.

There was a telephone in the library, and it was to this comfortable room that he went. If Kelman was in London, there was a good possibility that he might be at his club at this hour. He tried three numbers without success, but on one call he was only just unfortunate.

"Mr. Kelman was here ten minutes ago, sir," the steward told him. "No, sir, he left no word with us, and I don't think he will be returning. Usually when he means to dine here he speaks to Rickett, but today nothing was said."

He hung up and came back, disappointed.

"I'm sorry, Miss Elter, your Mr. Kelman is just about the hardest man in England to pin down. I thought I'd get him at the Addison, but I missed him by a matter of minutes. I guess that's about all that we can do now in that line. But you could quite easily stay here for the night; dine with us and I'll call Kelman later. You're bound to see him in the morning."

The girl hesitated. "I didn't come prepared to stay——" she began.

"I can give you anything that you require," Marion added. "Do stay. I should love you to."

But Margaret Elter shook her head.

"No. I'm sorry. I'd forgotten something which puts it out of the question. I must return to London tonight. There is someone else that I have to see, and it would be unfair to keep him waiting."

She was balancing her saucer in her hand, and Marion saw that she was trembling like a leaf.

The girl had gone deathly white, and her lips showed blood-red against the pallor of her skin.

"Are you feeling all right?" Marion jumped to her feet in alarm.

The girl swallowed.

Cinnaforde was leaning across. "You don't look well, Miss Elter. I think that you should remain for the night."

"No! No!" Her voice was little more than a whisper. "I'll be all right. Just give me a moment." She lay back among the cushions and the alarmed Spicer ran for brandy.

It seemed to be unnecessary. When he got back she was sitting up and making her excuses.

"I'm so desperately sorry . . . it was so silly of me. Sometimes I take these turns. My heart, I think."

Cinnaforde nodded cheerily.

"I'm troubled with my heart myself," he admitted. "I'll give you the address of the finest healer in Europe . . . Sir John Kinnaird."

The girl shook her head. She seemed to have recovered her good spirits again. "No . . . I'm afraid that your Sir John wouldn't do me much good after all. My heart trouble is too long-standing. I've had it for eight years now." She smiled into his eyes bravely, Marion thought. Then she rose to her feet. "I'm really sorry that I can't wait. I should love to. One doesn't often meet homely American folks in England. Especially these days."

Mr. Spicer made a suggestion, but she shook her head.

"No, thank you. I really am all right now, and I couldn't put you to that trouble."

"Unfortunately Mander was sent away," Spicer told her. "However, I'll run you down in my own car. At least Ferguson will take you."

"What about me?" Cinnaforde chuckled. "Marion and I could do with a little run down as far as Cinnaforde Halt. It would give us a little breather before dinner."

But Miss Elter was adamant.

"I've taken up too much of your time as it is and I'm not going to presume any further. If your man can take me down, Mr. Spicer, I'll be delighted. If not, I think I'd rather walk. The fresh air might help my head a little. . . ."

Ferguson was at the door in a few moments. They heard the car draw up in front of the six steps and stop.

Margaret Elter said: "I can't thank you enough for your kindness. I'll telephone Mr. Kelman as soon as I get to London, and explain things to him. . . . No, I don't know if I'll be back this way again, Miss Campbell. I don't expect to be in England any longer than a few days."

She shook hands.

Mr. Spicer had advice to give, most of it dealing with instructions

for her travelling welfare, and to this she listened and thanked him prettily.

"I'll be calling Kelman tonight," he said. "I've got a little bit of business to talk over with him, and if he comes in at all I'll leave word to have him call me. I'll let him know that you were here."

He waved her into the big limousine, and watched it pull out of the circular courtyard. Then he went upstairs and found his daughter, disturbed.

"Daddy," she said, "I wish she hadn't gone. She didn't look well, poor thing. I feel almost guilty enough to go after her."

"Her heart," said her sententious father.

Cinnaford shook his head.

"No. You're wrong there, sir. I've had a lot more contact with frightened people than you have. That girl was terrified for her life."

There was a second of silence.

"Terrified?" echoed Mr. Spicer. "Good lord, Selwyn, what do you mean?"

Selwyn St. David shrugged his broad shoulders. "Just what I say. Something frightened her . . . terrified her! Her heart? That was only an excuse. No . . . the girl was almost fainting with fear. It seemed to me as though she had suddenly thought of something—something that made her very much afraid. I've seen people like that before. A girl in Lansing, Michigan. It seemed that her husband was . . ." He particularized and Mr. Spicer was horrified.

"But this is not Lansing, Cinnaford. It's not even Detroit, or any other part of the States. You're in the heart of England now, where these sort of things don't happen."

"I know," said Cinnaford unhappily. "That's what makes it all the more puzzling." He got up to go. "Sorry I can't wait for dinner, but Mr. Truett is coming up on the 5.15. We've got some business to go over and there are some papers to sign." He took his farewell of the older man and went downstairs with Marion.

At the big fire which burned in the hall she drew him to a stop. "Selwyn . . . did you really mean that? About Miss Elter, I mean?"

"Miss Elter? Oh yes, that was her name." He laughed shortly. "I should never have left the newspaper game, Marion. I was calling her 'The Girl with the Frightened Eyes'." And then he frowned. "I shouldn't have said that. I'm an alarmist and I love melodrama. Coleman always said that my imagination was what he liked about me."

"Who was Coleman?"

"A slave-driver I once knew," he said cryptically. He thought of the discipline of that Simon Legree and gave a little chuckle. "And now, good night. Don't worry about Miss Elter. The chances are that I am entirely wrong."

He kissed her and walked along towards the big door, opened it, and she shivered as a gust of wind swept down the hall. For a second he was silhouetted there against the grey light of a winter's night.

Then he was gone. She stood for a moment and then went slowly

upstairs. She was going into the comfortable little lounge when she heard the sound of his car pulling down the driveway.

Her father was smoking an aromatic cigar. He took it out of his mouth and said: "Miss Elter has left something behind her, Marion." He pointed to a small compact that was lying on the table beside him. "Must have slipped from her knee while she was sitting there. I saw it when Joseph came in to light the lamps. I've got a very quick eye for anything that glitters!" He went on to describe the celerity with which he noted anything that reflected light, but the girl was hardly listening.

She lifted the compact. It was small and of some black, ivory-like material and the corners were gold-plated. Inexpensive, and yet in good taste, she thought. She opened it.

There was a mirror with a crack across it, and a very little powder, and a tiny puff. And then she saw the engraving, so clogged with powder that she could barely read it.

"Give me the reading-glass, Daddy."

He handed over the large glass and she lifted it up and read aloud:

"TO MARGARET
FROM HER LOVING HUSBAND
MARK."

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Spicer, and the pious exclamation was in her eyes at least excusable.

For it was Mark Kelman that she was thinking about.

CHAPTER TWO

IT WAS ALMOST DARK WHEN FERGUSON LET THE WHITE-FACED GIRL out at the station, and by this time she had recovered her composure sufficiently to offer him a ten-shilling note.

He took it, surprised, and went through to the station with her, for the necessity for 'blacking-out' made the road difficult for a stranger. As she went she saw that he was eyeing her intently.

"There should be a train at 5.18," he informed. "I'll find out from Bayliss, miss, if you'd care to wait here."

She hesitated and then nodded. "Very good, do so, please." She settled herself in the tiny waiting-room and looked around her. These English stations were amusing places, and yet there was an attempt at comfort in them too. A fire burned redly in a dusty grate and threw a pale glow through the darkness of the room.

Ferguson came back in a moment followed by a plump little man in uniform. "Bayliss says there is a train at 5.40, miss. The old 5.18 doesn't stop here now. The 5.40 is an express, but he can stop her if

there is any necessity. The next train isn't until eight o'clock." He plucked at his damp beard.

"Oh!" She was a little upset. "It seems a very important thing to do, doesn't it?" And then she nodded. "Thank you then, Ferguson. I'll arrange with Bayliss."

The chauffeur touched his cap and went out, and in a moment or so she heard the car start up.

Bayliss was concerned with the lighting of lamps for her comfort. There were two oil lamps hanging from a bracket, and these he dusted and lit. He tidied up the fireplace and came back to her. "You'll want me to stop the 5.40, miss?"

She considered him.

"I don't know. If there was somewhere to go to pass an hour or so, I'd willingly go. Is there a restaurant or an inn?"

There was an inn at Cinnaford, a mile back, he informed her, and a comfortable place too. Voyce was an old jockey, but he'd lost a leg after a steeplechase accident several years before and that had effectively ended his racing career. The 'Grey Man' was a comfortable house, and Voyce an honest fellow.

She came to a decision.

"You've almost convinced me, Bayliss. I think that I ought to put up here for the night. Do you think they could accommodate me?"

Bayliss was certain of it.

"He isn't pushed for room, miss. You'll be comfortable there, and you could get the ten o'clock train in the morning to Waterloo."

She thanked him and gave him a half-crown and he walked as far as the road with her and gave her directions. "A half-mile along, miss, the road forks. Bear to the right and you'll be in Cinnaford in ten minutes. The 'Grey Man' is on your left as you go into the village, and you can't miss it. Voyce has a red lamp outside his gate, and that will keep you straight."

She stepped out into the darkness.

It was raining heavily, and the constant drip of it from the hedges to the road was muffled in the sigh of the wind. She walked on, thankful that the gale was at her back, and she had traversed half the distance when she heard the sound of a car. In a moment or so she saw it coming towards her, the two tiny headlamps casting a feeble glow on the narrow road. For a brief second they flickered over her and then they were past and the sound of the engine died in the distance.

The wind whistled in the telephone wires overhead, and once she felt herself give a cold little shiver.

It was curious that she should feel like that, for there was really no need for her to be afraid. If anyone was afraid, well, she rather imagined that it would be Sherman. She thought of Sherman and the silly young man who came nightly to the 'Purple Slipper'. That had been in the bad old days when Eddy Schultz and Fred Gehringer were keeping Brooklyn wide open. Before the federal men had started to

tighten up or Mr. District Attorney Dewey had been quite so well known as he subsequently became.

Sherman had been clever, even in those far-off days, and the young man had been the veriest mug. She had thought at the time that he was English, for 'London Larry', who was one of Fred Gehringer's leg men, was an Englishman, and he had spoken just as did Sherman's friend. When she asked him, Sherman was evasive. He always had been an evasive sort of man, and in his good-humoured way he had told her frankly that it was no concern of hers.

She was thinking about Sherman and the Englishman at the 'Purple Slipper' when she heard the car coming back, and she drew into the hedge to let it pass.

Five minutes later she came to the village. There was a clustered collection of houses ahead of her, and even in the darkness of the winter's night she could see the white-stuccoed fronts of some of the houses.

There was a red lamp hanging at her left, and walking up to it she found an iron rail that obviously protected the garden in front of the 'Grey Man'. She followed this and went up two steps to the porch, and then opened the door.

There was a glass door beyond this, and through it she caught a glimmer of light and heard the sound of voices. She found the bell and pressed it, and in a moment the door opened.

It was Voyce who stood there in the bright light of the room, a cheery little man with a wooden leg. He said: "Come in, miss. Come in. We were expecting you!"

"Expecting me?"

He chuckled. "Bayliss called up from the station to let us know you were coming down. He's very obliging like that." He supplied the further information that the stationmaster was his wife's brother, and she smiled as she understood Bayliss's enthusiasm for the 'Grey Man'.

Voyce limped behind her to the door.

"Martha . . . will you take the young lady to her room?" He smiled at her. "You can sign the book later on, miss. You'll be wet through. Pity you didn't have some things of your own."

She was soaked. Until just now it had not occurred to her that she was so wet, but now she looked down at her slim, saturated legs and nodded. "I might have been wiser if I'd brought a case. However, I didn't mean to stay overnight."

A plump, red-cheeked woman came through from the rear. "I've put a fire in your room, miss . . ."

"Miss Elter," the girl said. She smiled her thanks. "That was very good of you, Mrs. Voyce. You are Mrs. Voyce, aren't you?"

Mrs. Voyce implied that she was.

"You'll find it colder here than you would in London. Most folk seem to feel the cold when they come from London to the country."

"I don't know if any place could be much colder than London is," the girl said. "I'm an American and possibly I'm prejudiced—"

or perhaps it's just that my blood is thin. But London seems to me the coldest place in the world."

"An American?" Mrs. Voyce was impressed. "My, imagine you coming over here just now with air-raids and submarines and all. I wouldn't have done it for a thousand pounds."

"I did it for considerably less!" said the girl dryly.

She was shown into a comfortable, low-ceilinged room, papered in some warm, light shade. There was a huge log-fire burning, and the red glow of the firelight licked warmly at the walls.

She gave a little gasp of pleasure.

"How comfortable it all seems. I'm going to love this little room, Mrs. Voyce. . . . I can see myself wanting to stay for a week at least."

Mrs. Voyce was pleased herself.

"You can have a bath, miss, and dinner will be ready for you at seven." She hesitated, with her hand on the doorknob. "Is there anything else I can bring you? Voyce has your coat in the drying-room downstairs. My slippers wouldn't fit you, but I've got a pair that a young lady left here last Christmas, and I could give you a pair of lisle stockings."

"And I'll accept them gladly," the girl said. Her spirits were coming back now, for in the comfort of this little room all the fears and shadows of the night were being dispelled. She heard the water running for her bath and she sat down and began to take off her sodden shoes.

She was thinking about Marion Campbell when she stepped out of the moist, hot air of the bathroom and came back to her open room. She sat down for a few minutes in front of the fire and tried to shake out her damp hair. There was a comb and a brush on the table and she used this, and after a moment shook out her locks and leaned back against the heavy sofa. There was a warm comfort here that was not to be despised.

Mrs. Voyce had apparently located the slippers. They lay on the inside of the hearth, and a pair of cheap stockings had been placed inside of them. She drew them on and pulled on the slippers, and if they were a trifle wider around her ankles than fashion demanded, they were at least comfortable.

She sat for a moment or two and stared into the leaping flames. It was queer that she should find herself in such a position. When she had left her London hotel this morning no such idea had been in her mind.

There was the sound of footsteps on the stairway and then a tap at the door.

Mrs. Voyce came in. "We've laid out dinner for you, Miss Elter."

"I'll be down in a few minutes, thank you."

She rose and completed her toilet. Her hair was soft and wavy now—too much so, she thought. Still, it was unlikely that she would have company at dinner.

When she went downstairs she found that she was mistaken. The table was set for two, and her fellow guest was warming himself by the fire. He turned as she came into the room, a large, pompous man who introduced himself at once.

He was in the mattress manufacturing line of business, he informed her, and his name was Woodbridge, Gordon Woodbridge. He was surprised and somewhat hurt to learn that she had never heard of the Woodbridge WakeNot Mattress. It had been advertised all over England. Every hoarding and every wall had borne its pictorial likeness.

When she explained that she was an American he was somewhat mollified. "Ah—that explains things, Miss Elter. I have been in the States myself. A very fine country, but a little . . . er . . . a little strange to a man who has lived all his life in England. Here we have a certain conservative decorum and a more conventional approach to our problems."

She gathered that his trip to the States had not been wholly successful. And this in fact was the case.

"Conditions are radically different here," he went on. "For example . . ."

She nodded, scarcely listening.

Mr. Woodbridge was a fluent man, and he was never so fluent as when he was talking about Mr. Woodbridge. For an hour the conversation was largely about Mr. Woodbridge and Mr. Woodbridge's mattress-making works; his ingenuity in handling opposition and the terrible things that happened to the Morrello-Mattress Corporation who had dared to flout Mr. Woodbridge; his ability in dealing with all forms of industrial disputes, and the hangdog expression on the faces of the Union leaders who had opposed him on the vexed question of wage increases.

"I told them," he said, in a voice that trembled with suppressed indignation, "I told them that they were as well paid as any men in the industry, and that only two years before I had given them an increase, that costs were rising for me as well as for them and that I was a man of my word. I'd sooner close the factory than give in!"

It was after this that he had excused himself and had drifted away. She sat for some time and stared into the fire, and she was still there when Mrs. Voyce came through to remove the plates. It was still raining outside. She heard the beat of the driving rain on the window-panes and the song of the wind in the wide chimney.

Of a sudden she asked a question and the woman considered her gravely. "It's a powerful wild night, Miss Elter," she said dubiously, "but if you really want to go out, I'll see what I can do. I've got a pair of Wellington boots that I've never worn much because they are too small for me, and I think they should fit you. And Voyce has a raincoat. . . . Yes, miss, if you really want to go out."

She disappeared and came back in a few moments carrying the required articles, and after she had added a further comfort in the form of a long woollen scarf, she watched the girl dress for outdoors.

"Raining very hard just now, miss. Voyce was outside getting Mr. Woodbridge away and he was pretty wet when he came back. I could get you an umbrella, but it's so windy you couldn't hold it."

"I'll be quite all right," the girl laughed, and made for the door. It was very dark outside and she stood for a moment or two until her eyes became accustomed to the night. Then she stepped out into the darkness. Through the driving rain she could see the hazy outline of the village and she walked through it without interruption. The road that led to Friar's Hall where Mark Kelman lived in some state lay to her left. She followed along it, her eyes seeking a road junction, for here she had noted a telephone-box earlier in the day.

She had left the village behind when she heard the sound of footsteps behind her, and she stopped for a minute to listen.

They slithered into silence, and when she continued she did not hear them again. For all that, her caution was aroused. She felt an odd coldness in the region of her spine, and she looked behind her into the darkness as she walked.

In ten minutes she had reached the box, and it dripped rain from every surface. She shivered as she went inside and groped in her pocket for the flashlight that she carried.

The kiosk was at least dry. She leaned against the side for a moment or two and then paid the toll demanded and found her number.

In a moment or so she heard a man's voice.

"This is Friar's Hall. Who is speaking, please?"

"Miss Elter," she said. "I called this afternoon to see Mr. Kelman but he was in London. Has he returned yet?"

"I'm sorry, miss," she heard the butler say. "Mr. Kelman will not be back tonight. He telephoned through about seven o'clock to say that he had to go to Sheerness tomorrow morning and that he would spend the night in London."

"Oh." She was disappointed. "Sheerness? Where is that?"

"Somewhere at the mouth of the Thames." The butler was a little vague in his geography. "I have a sister who is in service at Gillingham and I gather that Sheerness is comparatively convenient."

She thanked him and hung up, a little disturbed, for it had been in the hope of seeing Kelman that she had waited. For a moment or two she stood there in silence and listened to the rain drip from the roof. Then, as the gale abated a trifle, she opened the door and went out.

There was a car close at hand and it was running without lights. She listened for a second or two and then the sound of the engine seemed to die out, and she tried to give her thoughts and attention to the affairs of Mark Kelman.

Kelman would be interested in what she had to say. There was no doubt about that. There was less doubt that he would pay well for the information that she had to give, for Kelman was notoriously generous. He could afford to be, she reasoned. Her thoughts went back again to Sherman and the ease with which he handled a gun.

There was a sudden gust of wind and rain, and she drew her coat more tightly about her. The road led down past a little clump of spruce now, and she could see the dark shape of it ahead. Again she thought that she heard the sound of running footsteps, but this time they were far to the left of her, and since there were only rain-soaked fields here, she must have been mistaken. There was a plaintive eeriness about these English roads that she had never noted at home.

Then, in the darkness she saw someone loom up in front of her.

In a second she had her flashlight in her hand, and had swept it upwards. In the feeble light of the beam she saw a tallish man, but his face was hidden in the depths of his collar. Then she saw the rain-soaked beard, and a sense of familiarity came to her.

"Ferguson!" she burst out. "You are Mr. Spicer's chauffeur!"

He did not speak for a second, then:

"Put that light out!"

There was something in his voice which caused the ice to congeal at her heart. She gasped, "You! . . ." She would have screamed, but his hand clutched at her throat, and then something coughed in the darkness.

In the scream of the wind the sound of it did not carry, but it was the last thing that she heard on this earth. He let her down very gently to the road and then moved off into the darkness. He had gone a hundred yards along the road when the lights of a car suddenly flashed on and he stood in the dim light of them. A door scraped open and a voice said: "Can you tell me . . .?"

He moved like a flash and the blackness swallowed him.

The traveller scratched his head and closed the door of the car. He was driving away when the thought of what he had seen struck him and he knew the feeling of fear.

CHAPTER THREE

IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE THAT CAUSED CENTRAL INSPECTOR MCIVER TO be at Waterloo when the London-Southampton Express arrived at its destination, for he took a poor view of such concurrences of circumstances as were devoid of obvious causal connection. He stood, a tall, sober man, and leaned against the barrier as the ticket-collectors accepted their briefs. He did not appear to be interested in the travellers at all, and it was not until the florid man had stepped past the barrier and was buttoning up his pocket that he made his presence known.

"Good morning, Guilder," he said, and the stout man stared.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake," he began, but McIver could only smile.

"I make a few," he admitted, "but I haven't made one this time.

What is the lay, Joe? Washing-machines or genuine Persian rugs from Manchester?"

The other stiffened.

"My name is Woodbridge," he said. "Gordon Woodbridge, and I have never met you before. Kindly allow me to pass."

"Your name is Joseph Guilder," said the sober inspector, "and I have a car waiting for you over there." He nodded his head and Guilder grew very pale, for in the bag he carried there was the most damnable evidence of his calling.

For a second it seemed as though he would make a bolt for freedom, but very suddenly he saw two bulky men loom out of the grey morning shadows, and he knew them for detectives. The smaller of them placed a big hand on his arm and said: "Take a walk, Joe."

And Mr. Joseph Guilder, alias Gordon Woodbridge, manufacturer of mattresses, and alias many another name, climbed into the police-car that was waiting, for by one name or another he had been under police observation for a very long time, and that with excellent reason.

On the journey to the police-station he was politely voluble. It was all a mistake, of course, and the police would very soon be able to satisfy themselves on that score. He was Joseph Guilder all right, there was no use in denying that at all, but the police had not one thing in the world on him. His conscience was clear and there were no clouds in the sky of his future. So much he informed them.

"What's in the bag?" asked the detective who had arrested him, and Joe Guilder stared at the bag which he had been carrying with horrified amazement.

He had never seen the bag before in his life. It was not his own bag. That had had a large stain on the right side of it just below the lock.

"You picked up the wrong bag?" asked the incredulous detective, and Guilder nodded incoherently. In a moment or two his incoherency disappeared, and he made extravagant denials and accusations.

There had been a large, stout man who had stood beside him in the corridor. Inadvertently he had taken the wrong case.

"If you hurry back to the station you may pick him up," he suggested, but his suggestion was received without enthusiasm, and for a moment there was an awkward silence.

"Perhaps the fellow will report it," he said with some confidence. He shook his head. "Anyway, I don't want to get into trouble. This fellow got on the train with me at Southampton. I remember seeing him. Perhaps you'll take charge of this bag and take it off my hands."

"I was going to suggest that possibility," said the detective, and then and there, without preamble, he began to speak, not as a mildly humorous individual, but as a stern and righteous inspector of detectives.

"You didn't come from Southampton, Guilder. You were at Birmingham on Tuesday last. From there you made your way to

Cheltenham and then to Bristol. You drove with Conroy as far as Salisbury and then you doubled back to Andover. Last night you slept at Cinnaford or in that locality, and this morning you caught the Waterloo train at Winchester."

Mr. Guilder was horrified at the accuracy of this information. He was more horrified when they reached the police-station and the bag that he carried was opened, for here, under the carefully laundered shirts, was a miscellaneous assortment of little cylinders containing heroin, cocaine, and other illegal medicaments, the possession of which was a crime in the eyes of the law.

"Good lord!" he said in pious horror.

McIver was a methodical man. He took one of the little bakelite tubes between forefinger and thumb and turned the metal top. When it had loosened, he poured out the contents into the palm of his hand, and as the crystalline heap grew larger he smiled the more grimly. He took a pinch of the white substance and applied it to his tongue.

"Cocaine," he announced cheerfully.

Mr. Guilder shook a grief-stricken head. "Imagine that! And this fat fellow looked as decent a fellow as you or I do. It only goes to show!"

What it went to show he did not particularize, for McIver was talking.

"We've been on the trail of you fellows for a while now, Guilder, and at long last we've been able to make an arrest. Conroy was picked up at Chipping Norton last night. You didn't know that, did you?"

Mr. Guilder did not know that, and this information brought him cold comfort, for Conroy had the reputation of being a notorious talker. A chill feeling began to encircle his heart.

"If you think I've been peddling this stuff you're wrong," he began virtuously. "Naturally it looks suspicious. I'd feel the same if I were in your position, Inspector. But dope is one thing I wouldn't touch. Now this stout fellow I was telling you about——"

"Don't let us discuss the ridiculous," said the inspector, and consigned the mythical traveller to oblivion.

Guilder was agitated, and his agitation betrayed itself.

"You're not going to make a charge——" he began.

"You'll get five years," said McIver, whose patience was exhausted. "And now there's a man here who wants to see you." He nodded to the plain-clothes man. "Take him through to the chief inspector."

Chief Inspector Dimm was a large man with a bald, sloping forehead and a fair, bushy moustache. He was a ponderous man and a pompous man, but he was not a clever one, although (and this was a remarkable thing) he would have been shocked if he had imagined you thought so.

In a sense, he had been fortunate, for if you examined his record you found little in it to suggest that he should attain elevated office. He had done moderately well on minor cases, but the Batten murder case placed the seal on his achievements. This had happened when he was a lowly sergeant at the C.I.D., and the memory of it was never

far from him. When Henry Batten, triple murderer, went out to his death one morning at Pentonville, Dimm's was the hand that had started him on the path, for Sergeant Dimm had arrested him at Newhaven, ten minutes before the *Rouen* would have carried him to Dieppe and to freedom.

He received due recognition for this, more indeed than he deserved, for the newspapers did not know about old Inspector Silver, who had worked on the case from the beginning, and who had taken a heart attack on the Strand when he was on the point of leaving for Victoria to arrest Batten. It was fortunate for Dimm that he happened to see the old man stagger; more fortunate still that Silver was so much a policeman that even in death he could gasp out instructions to this Yard man whom he recognized. But the most fortunate thing of all was the fact that the old inspector was a secretive man, and that no one at New Scotland Yard was aware of the information which he had collected. Dimm seized the opportunity with both hands and came back to London a famous man.

In his youth he had been a soldier, having cleaned kit and polished boots for three years in the Grenadier Guards. The Commissioner at Scotland Yard was a Grenadier officer, and like cleaves to like. Dimm prospered. In two years he was an inspector, and when old Chief Inspector Burnett had retired he had stepped up to fill that great man's chair.

He was writing something just now, and he looked up importantly at a fresh-complexioned man in a very clean collar.

"What's this, Farrow?"

"Guilder, sir. Inspector McIver picked him up this morning at Waterloo."

"Ah yes." Chief Inspector Dimm nodded impressively. "You can go now, Farrow. I'll ring for you when I want you." And when the door closed: "Guilder, eh? We've had trouble with you before!" He searched his files, and Mr. Guilder felt his heart sink.

"What have you to say for yourself?"

Mr. Guilder had plenty to say for himself, for he was a voluble man. He told the story of the stout man, and Inspector Dimm listened and nodded. Sometimes he took a note. In a little while he rang the desk bell, and when Farrow appeared said:

"Ask Inspector McIver to come here."

McIver came, filling his pipe. He was not a favourite with his superior, who liked sycophantic men. Just now he irritated the chief inspector by sitting down uninvited.

Dimm frowned.

"I've been talking to Guilder. What steps have you taken to apprehend this stout man?"

McIver was genuinely puzzled, then as light appeared: "Oh . . . the man who left the bag for Guilder to pick up? I'm afraid I've done nothing. He only exists in Guilder's imagination. If you had read my report you would have noted that Guilder boarded the train at Winchester—not Southampton."

The chief inspector was nettled.

"A clue is a clue, McIver. You young fellows are all alike. You aren't thorough enough. I'll grant you that there might not be much in this story—but if you want to be a good detective you've got to sift every item of evidence and investigate everything you hear. When I was working on the Batten case . . ." He launched into a description of his own unflagging zeal and McIver listened patiently.

When he had finished the younger man nodded.

"In this case, sir, things are a little different. Guilder's been in the drug traffic for years. So has Conroy, and so has the woman—Ellen Harkness—who was arrested at Esher. What we want to do is to find out who is behind them. Guilder will get five years if I go on the stand and tell all I know. If I throw my weight against him he may get seven. On the other side, if he wants to make things simpler for us, we can reciprocate and he might get off with two years. That is a matter for his own conscience. Personally I'm inclined to let things slide, because I've a pretty good idea that we can put Henry Melver behind bars without any co-operation from him."

Guilder had gone grey at the mention of the name.

McIver chuckled. "You didn't think we knew as much as that, did you, Guilder?" And then his geniality dropped from him like a cloak as he leaned forward.

"So far as you are concerned, Guilder, it's a race against time. We'll get Melver and everyone else in the game—and we'll get them soon. You've got an hour or two, so make up your mind about what you mean to do. I'm making no bargain and I'm giving no promises. Make a statement to the police, and I'll read it through. If you give me any real evidence to put up against Melver I'll remember you when I go into the box. If you sit tight I'll remember that too."

He got to his feet, and then the malignity on the man's face stopped him.

"Damn you!" Guilder screamed. "You're a clever lot, aren't you? You'll put me away and you'll put Conroy away and you'll put Melver away! Why don't you go after some of the big fellows for a change? Why don't you leave the rest of us alone for a spell? The trouble is you haven't got the nerve, and you haven't got the brains!"

"Hold your tongue!" said the chief inspector. Any reference to brains annoyed him.

Guilder shook his head. "You can put me away. You can do what you like with the little fellows—and the big crooks can sit tight and laugh at you."

"What big crooks do you know who do much laughing these days?" asked the interested McIver.

Guilder scowled. "Plenty. There's Isenheimer."

"When I last saw Isenheimer he wasn't laughing much," said McIver grimly. "Nor had he any reason to laugh, for I got him ten years. You didn't know that?"

Guilder licked his lips. "It's a lie," he said. "He couldn't have been sent up. Not without me knowing about it."

"Yet he was sent up," said McIver, "at a secret session of the Old Bailey. The charge was one of espionage, and he was very fortunate that he was not shot at the Tower."

Guilder blanched. "Isenheimer? Was he a German? Funny, but I'd never thought about that." And then the anger came back into his face. "Well, there's others. What about Grey Face?"

There was a little silence.

"What indeed?" asked McIver.

Guilder nodded. "Why don't you go after him? I'll tell you why you don't! Because you couldn't catch him if you tried. He's clever and he's dangerous."

And here he spoke no more than the truth, for Grey Face was both clever and dangerous.

Chief Inspector Dimm broke into the conversation, for he had been too long silent.

"We're not here to discuss Grey Face with you, Guilder. You've heard the inspector. Do you make a statement or not? That's the question."

But Guilder could afford to be reckless.

"You'll never catch him. Never! I know you busies as well as any man. You're quick enough to jump on the little crooks, but Grey Face is out of your class. You can't touch him, because he's a clever man, cleverer than any of you."

McIver said mildly:

"What do you know about Grey Face?"

"Me?" Guilder sniffed. "Nothing! And I don't want to know anything, either. That fellow is sudden death." And then, as a memory came to him: "I only saw him once——"

He stopped, appalled at what he had said.

"You only saw him once——" said the encouraging McIver.

The man shook his head, he was white now. "You can forget that I said that, McIver. You'll get nothing out of me."

But McIver had come back from the door and was staring down at him with interest. "I'd never have thought that you'd be on Grey Face's list of acquaintances, Guilder. What do you know?"

"Nothing!" said Guilder emphatically, and by the dogged note in his voice the inspector was aware that further questioning was useless.

"You will be charged," he said, "and you will be convicted." He nodded to the chief inspector and went out, leaving that impatient man with the feeling that the interview had been taken out of his hands.

It was a sensation that he frequently experienced where McIver was concerned, and this young officer did not rank high in his estimation, for Chief Inspector Dimm firmly believed that discipline was the essence of efficiency and that lesser luminaries could not accord him too much respect. He was all for a lot of respect.

Inspector McIver went along to his own office and met a man who showed him none.

Sergeant Bragg was a small man, thick of build and genial of

countenance. He had blue eyes and a ruddy complexion, and his fairish hair was brushed across a bald forehead. He was a pompous man and he had a waxed moustache, and an irritating trick of appearing omniscient on matters of police procedure or interest, for he was loath to admit that anything of criminal interest had ever happened at Scotland Yard to which he had not been privy.

He was sitting on the desk, swinging his short legs, his fingers toying with the thick gold chain that he wore to proclaim his affluence. He wore a shiny blue suit, a stiff white collar, and a necktie that was generally sacred to the pupils of a famous college. He looked up and nodded.

"You got Guilder. Not before time, either. If I'd been in your place I'd have had that fellow behind the bars a long time ago. What did he say?"

McIver sat down.

"Not much. He'll talk though."

"They all do," said the knowledgeable Bragg. "Give him an hour or two to think things over. Tell him what a cold, bleak place Dartmoor is, and let him know how Mr. Justice Anglerick hates drug-traffickers. That's how to do it. If I'd been handling him he'd have told the story of his life."

McIver was soberly surprised.

"I didn't know that you were a psychologist, Bragg. Anyway, he is in competent hands. Dimm is questioning him at present. I've no doubt that he'll talk."

Bragg sniffed.

"He'll talk if Dimm gives him a chance to talk," he said disagreeably. "Personally, I doubt it. That man never gives anyone a chance to talk. He talked himself into an inspectorship and he talked himself into a chief inspectorship. The sound of his own voice is as music to his ears, to use a Biblical expression."

"There are people like that," said the dry inspector, and Bragg nodded. "There are—and he's the first of them. That man is so fond of himself he never lets up."

He would have said more, but McIver introduced a new topic.

"Guilder has seen Grey Face."

The sergeant stared at him. "Grey Face! What do you mean?"

"It was a slip. He didn't mean to let it out, but he was rattled, and he was angry. It was out before he could help it. He saw Grey Face, that was all that he said—but we'll get more out of him."

Bragg was interested.

"I've got a theory about Grey Face," he began. "Now take this . . ."

A lot of people had theories concerning Grey Face, for this amazingly successful criminal had defied Scotland Yard for more than two years now.

When the London and Scottish Midland Bank had been relieved of forty thousand pounds in cash, the bandit had set a new style in criminals, for he had interviewed Mr. Silas Gunn, the manager, in his

own office. Mr. Gunn had been able to give no adequate description. All that he could say was that a "tallish sort of man with a grey veil over his face" had walked into his office and had produced an automatic. He had given certain instructions, and Mr. Gunn had carried them out.

Two months later the grey man had walked into the Lombard Street branch of Rankin's Bank and had taken fifteen thousand pounds in notes. When Scotland Yard detectives arrived, they found two hysterical women, an apoplectic manager, and in the foyer of the bank a silk stocking.

That this had fallen from the pocket of the robber was the point of view of Superintendent Lynd, and in this he was correct.

"Obviously this was your grey veil, Battersby," he said to the manager. "Mr. Gunn of the London and Scottish Midland Bank also stated that the man who held him up wore a grey veil. My theory is that the robber carried an ordinary silk stocking in his pocket instead of a mask. Actually, it is much more satisfactory, for it enabled him to see quite clearly, while it completely blotted out his own features. I suggest that he made his way to your office unobserved, and that he drew on the covering before he came inside. When he left your room, he locked you in, discarded the stocking and walked calmly outside. There is your Grey Face!"

"Show me my fifteen thousand," said Battersby, who had no interest in theories but was terribly concerned with his losses.

And here he had the sympathy of the public. For in quick succession Grey Face visited the Third American National, the Telfer Trust and Belleami's Bank in Fenchurch Street, and in this latter operation he had been surprised and attacked by a gallant but unwise bank messenger. The interruption proved to be costly. The messenger lost his life, and Mr. Sedbury Combe, a distinguished client, lost two fingers in the gunplay that followed. When the Flying Squad arrived at the elaborate façade, Grey Face had disappeared and no man had seen him go.

This time there was a dead man!

The newspapers took the matter up, and asked embarrassing questions with a fine scorn. They did not attempt to answer them, for that was not part of their function, but their downright allusions were almost insulting.

Grey Face was quiet for some little time, and then at the end of six months he appeared in the North. The Newcastle branch of the Farmers' Bank was held up in broad daylight and twelve thousand pounds were taken. While Scotland Yard detectives were prowling the premises, Grey Face appeared in Edinburgh, and the East Lothian Bankers' Trust were seventeen thousand pounds the poorer.

On this occasion again a man had died, Walker, a middle-aged porter, having tried to close with the bandit. Grey Face had shot him twice, and while the stricken man had choked on his own blood he had walked out into Princes Street and was lost to sight.

The newspapers had been unusually bitter. Scotland Yard was

taken to task by caustic men who dipped their pens in the most virulent of acids and in the Houses of Parliament Mr. Boothby-Gore-Booth (Cons., Chamwood) wanted to know if the Home Secretary was not alarmed at the incidence of robbery and murder, and if the right honourable gentleman was satisfied that the function of the appropriate authority was being best utilized.

This was a fancy way of asking if the police were doing their duty, and the Home Secretary, who was a plain man, gave a sharp answer, so sharp that the honourable member for Chamwood sat down very suddenly.

But that evening the Home Secretary sent for the Commissioner of Police, and when that gentleman arrived he asked very bluntly :

"What are you doing about Grey Face?"

"We've got a thousand men searching for him," the Commissioner informed. "Lynd is in charge of the case—and you know him. He's a good man."

Mr. Hunter smiled grimly.

"Is he the best you've got?"

"Unquestionably." The Commissioner could be equally blunt. "He's had thirty-eight years at the Yard. He's clever—if it wasn't for the war he'd be on the retired list; I grant you that he's not so young as some of the other fellows, but he's got the experience. If any man can catch Grey Face, that man is Lynd!"

"Very good," said the Secretary. "But show me results—soon."

He had said no more, and indeed there was no necessity that he should elaborate. He had returned to the Yard and next morning there had been a conference, to which were commanded assistant commissioners, chief constables, superintendents, chief inspectors and divers other menials.

Chief Inspector Dimm had been present. In his voluble way he had made a suggestion which nobody had troubled to listen to, but he had come away a thoughtful man.

Sergeant Bragg had not been invited, and this was a source of annoyance to him.

"It's not as though it was any accidental omission," he said angrily, "for it's happened before. Anyway, Dimm was there. Muir tells me he had the cheek to make a suggestion to the Commissioner. Some silly sort of theory about Grey Face being a soldier because a soldier was seen in Fenchurch Street when Belleami's was held up. A soldier, when the country is full of them."

"There was also a soldier seen in Newcastle when the Farmers' Bank was looted. A private in battledress was noticed in the vicinity."

"Nobody ever described Grey Face as a soldier," said Bragg, and his superior chuckled.

"I wondered if that would occur to you. Apparently it hasn't occurred to Dimm yet. Anyway, let him have his theory. It will keep him quiet. I like him best when he's thinking. He's safest then."

In such tones of disrespect did he refer to his senior officer, and the sycophantic Bragg smirked his agreement.

"Well, that attends to that. Guilder will go up. I wish I'd been there when you pinched him, for I owe him one." He leaned across the desk and struggled with a drawer and produced a box and eventually a cigarette. He lit this and McIver sat as though paralysed at the effrontery.

"For two days," he said, "I've gone without cigarettes. For two days you've smoked your own and other people's. Now that I do locate an odd twenty, you have to get your fat paws on them."

"That's another ramp," grunted the sergeant. "Cigarettes. There are millions of them in the country. Where do they go to? I'd like to get on the trail of the man who's doing away with them."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Bragg.

It was a uniformed clerk. "Superintendent Lynd would like to see you, sir."

McIver got to his feet and went out.

It was ten minutes before he came back. When he did, all the geniality had gone from his features and he was alert and grimly keen. He went across to a cupboard and opened a door. There was a bag here, which he kept packed against emergencies.

"Get your things ready," he said. "We're going out of town."

Bragg slid to his feet. "What is it, McIver?"

"Inspector," said McIver, who could be a stickler himself at times. "Inspector McIver! And for your information it is murder!"

CHAPTER FOUR

A FARM WORKER GOING TO HIS WORK IN THE EARLY MORNING HAD stumbled over the grey hulk that lay on the road in front of him. At first he had thought that the body was a drunk; one of the casual labourers who had lain out all night in a state of inebriation. This had happened before, and the man had not been unprepared to deal with the emergency. He carried a small pocket torch, and when he had produced this he made a startling discovery.

It was a terror-stricken man who made his way to the village police-office and wakened the local constable from his warm bed. By good fortune the officer was young, ambitious and eminently sensible. He said: "Wait here till I telephone, and while you are waiting you can make some tea. There's the kettle."

In a moment or so he was dressed, had drunk over a cup of scalding tea and they were out on the main Cinnaford Road.

Margaret Elter lay as she had fallen. He made a brief examination by the light of his electric torch. There was a smear of blood on the girl's chest, and some of this had percolated to the roadway.

"It looks like murder," the young man said soberly. He rose to his feet. "You wait here, Cole, and don't let anyone touch the body. I'll go along to Grey Lodge and telephone."

The ploughman consented, without looking too happy, and the constable left him and strode along in the direction of Grey Lodge. It was after six o'clock and the first breath of light was stirring in the kitchens. He heard women's voices and saw the twinkle of a light behind drawn blinds.

There was a little surprise when he made his presence known, but an agreeable kitchenmaid took him to the telephone. He watched her out of earshot and then made his call. In five minutes' time the local inspector had an intimation of the affair, and the doctor had promised to come over at once.

Joseph let the policeman out, and that venerable man was somewhat intrigued. "It isn't every day we have a murder, Haycock. I suppose it is murder?"

There was just the right amount of scepticism in his voice to make P.C. Haycock bridle.

"It's murder all right," he said shortly. "She was shot through the heart. No chance of any mistake there."

It was an hour later that Mr. Spicer heard the details and that worthy man was shocked.

"Good heavens!" he said. "A woman murdered!"

Joseph, who had brought up the shaving water himself this morning, nodded an impressive head. "Yes, sir. And on the Cinnaford road, too. No, I don't know who she is, sir. Haycock didn't say."

Later Mr. Spicer came down to breakfast and heard the story from the kitchenmaid who had taken the policeman to the telephone, and later still came a sergeant of police to use the Grey Lodge telephone with Mr. Spicer's permission.

Mr. Spicer's permission was easily obtained, and the man completed his message. When he was leaving he dropped a piece of information that was interesting. Scotland Yard were to be called in, and the Chief Constable was driving over from Reading for a conference.

Mr. Spicer was intrigued.

"I've heard a lot about Scotland Yard," he admitted to Marion as they sat at breakfast in the morning-room. "But I never expected to see them functioning under my very nose."

"I don't expect that you will either," the girl said. "By the way, who was the woman?"

"I forgot to ask," Spicer said. "Joseph didn't know this morning. One of the locals, likely. Ah well, poor woman, she's gone now."

Later he went down to the scene of the crime, a burly man in a pepper-and-salt suit, his ruddy features aglow with interest and his eyes bright with excitement.

The spot was surprisingly quiet. A handful of people loitered at a respectable distance, and two police-cars were drawn up at the side of the road. Several men were walking around, treading carefully on the muddy road. Haycock had set up a barrier at one side of the road

and had stationed himself here in order to divert traffic should any appear.

The Chief Constable had arrived, a slight, dapper man whom Mr. Spicer knew by sight, and as he came forward the ex-officer nodded to him. "Good morning, Mr. Spicer."

"A bad business, Major."

Major Orde agreed. "A bad business indeed. Thank heaven we don't have many like it. A wanton, brutal murder. This Miss Elter——"

Spicer started.

"Who?"

"Miss Elter," said the major. He was watching the American and he saw the colour ebb from that cheerful man's cheeks.

"Miss Elter!" he gasped. "Good lord! That's the girl who was at Grey Lodge yesterday. Came up to visit Kelman and . . ." He shook his head. "It's monstrous . . . unbelievable! Are you sure that it really is she?"

Orde nodded.

"No doubt about that. Voyce was along and identified her. She was putting up the night with him. Apparently she went out pretty late last night and Voyce waited up until midnight for her. He knew that she had friends locally—she had mentioned Friar's Hall and Mr. Kelman, and when she didn't come back he was surprised, but not worried. He went to bed and didn't know anything about it until we knocked him up." And then his keen, dark eyes lighted. "What do you know about her?"

Mr. Spicer told all that he knew. He was thorough, and added detail, and to it all Major Orde listened carefully. When he had finished he nodded.

"Apparently she wanted to see Kelman very urgently, then. It's queer that she wouldn't put up the night with you, isn't it? It almost seems that she wanted you to imagine she had left Cinnaford and had gone back to London. Well, I'll try to get in touch with Kelman. And now, if you'll excuse me, sir, I'll get on with the job in hand."

Spicer was only too glad to excuse him. He returned to Grey Lodge and found the girl, and Marion was shocked.

"It is terrible," she said after a long, long time, and then the tears welled up in her eyes. "And to think, Daddy, if we had just got her to wait here . . ."

He nodded.

"It's nasty, Marion. By the way, I wonder if Cinnaford knows."

She shook her head.

"I'm sure I don't know. Selwyn will learn about it soon enough. Isn't it horrible?" She shivered a little. "She was afraid, Daddy. Can't you see that now? You remember what Selwyn said after she had gone . . . that the fear of death was in her eyes."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Spicer uneasily, and then he turned. "That sounds like a car."

It was. She went across to the window and saw the big Bentley

pull up at the front door. Cinnaford climbed out, and in a moment or two came up to the room.

"You've heard the news?" Mr. Spicer began, and the young man nodded.

"Yes. Pretty ghastly, isn't it? A horrible sort of thing. I was talking to Major Orde on the way up. Scotland Yard is being called in."

"I believe so." Mr. Spicer, who would have liked to have got in with this information first, was testy. "Poor girl! And to think that only yesterday she was here—in this very room——"

Cinnaford froze. "Here . . .?"

"Yes. It was that young lady—Miss Elter!"

Selwyn stared at him. "Good lord! Orde didn't mention that. I thought that it must have been a stranger—but . . ." And then his fingers drummed on the table-top.

"Going to be pretty nasty for Kelman."

Spicer said: "He'll be here today. I know Mark's style. It's bound to be a shock to him."

"I suppose so." Cinnaford was speculative. "Although if she was only a secretary or something . . ."

Mr. Spicer shook his head. He liked to make sensational utterances and he made one now. "She was more than that, or I'm very much mistaken. She was his wife."

"What?"

Cinnaford was lighting a cigarette. Now he shook out the match as it burned his fingers. "His wife? Kelman married?" He stared in flagrant disbelief.

Mr. Spicer shrugged.

"I'm not sure of it, of course—but something happened yesterday which made both Marion and I think that they were man and wife." And he told the story of the little compact.

Cinnaford was astonished.

"It's rather hard to believe, sir. By the way, where is it?"

"Marion has it somewhere. I suppose that the damned thing should be handed over to the police. I forgot about it this morning when I was talking to Orde. By the way, we'll have the police up here before long to question all of us. Who saw her last, now? Ferguson?"

He rang for the chauffeur.

It was ten minutes or so before that burly, bearded man came up to the room, and stood twirling his cap in his thick hands. He was a tall man, strongly built and thick through the shoulders, and he carried himself with an air of aggressive indifference.

Mr. Spicer cleared his throat. In his earlier days he had had some practice in the Idaho State Court, and he was lawyer-like now. "A terrible business this, Ferguson. You have heard of it, of course?"

Ferguson indicated that he had heard of the tragedy, and Mr. Spicer went on briskly:

"You drove Miss Elter to the station, Ferguson, and the police will

be wanting to question you. I am not without some experience of the police and their methods, and it may be that I can be of some assistance to you. Tell me what happened from the time that you left the house yesterday until you returned."

Ferguson stroked his beard for a moment.

"There really isn't very much to tell, sir. The young lady went to the station and I went in along with her. She wanted to make one or two enquiries about the trains and I fetched Bayliss for her. She gave me a ten-shilling note," he added.

Mr. Spicer was disappointed. "You may go, Ferguson. If Major Orde wishes to see you, I will let you know."

When the man had gone he paced the room. "It's a queer business, Cinnaford. Why should anyone want to murder that poor girl? Dastardly altogether."

Cinnaford shook his head. "We don't know that anyone did want to murder her. The chances are that it was a mistake. Has that never occurred to you? She may have been shot in mistake for somebody else."

Marion came in as he was speaking. The girl's face was white and unhappy.

"There's a detective in the kitchen," she said, "and by the look of him he'll be along to see us before long. Ella almost had hysterics when he started to question her."

There was indeed a detective in the lower house.

Sergeant Bragg was concluding his questioning when Mr. Spicer went out and encountered him in the hall, an untidy little man with a strong sense of his own importance.

Joseph, who hovered in the background, said: "This is the gentleman from Scotland Yard, sir."

"Bragg is the name," said the sergeant.

"Come right up, Inspector," said Mr. Spicer, and Bragg accepted promotion without blinking.

In the library he explained his presence.

"The Chief Constable called us in earlier in the morning, and I left McIver, who is collaborating with me, to get the gist of things at the scene of the crime."

"Quite," said Mr. Spicer.

"You've got a comfortable place here," said Bragg largely. "Naturally, knocking around the country like I do, you run across a great many fine places. Take Lord What's-his-name——"

Mr. Spicer was not willing to be side-tracked.

"You'll want to talk to my daughter and myself," he began. "And then there's Cinnaford. His lordship was here yesterday when Miss Elter called."

"Lord Cinnaford!" Bragg was impressed. "I think I met him once. A little stout man with a limp——"

Mr. Spicer shook an uninterested head. "That's not Selwyn. Maybe his cousin. Anyway, he's here just now and you'll be seeing him in a moment or two. Let's get down to facts, Inspector. I'm a

plain man, and I like plain language. I'll tell you all I know and you'll be able to corroborate what I say."

Bragg nodded, interested. He was a good listener and, despite his own garrulity, a shrewd and capable officer. He listened until he had heard the whole story without interruption, and then:

"It looks as though Miss Elter came to Cinnaford to meet Mr. Kelman. It looks as though she possibly had something to deliver to him—a message or something of that nature, but that someone anticipated her."

Spicer shook his head. The theory was one which interested him without appearing particularly pleasant.

Bragg had been taking notes. Now he looked up and said: "Let's get this straight, sir. Miss Elter called on you yesterday, and said she was a friend of Mr. Kelman's and that she had been sent down here by his butler. She asked you if you could get in touch with the gentleman, and you put through several calls to London without being successful. You invited Miss Elter to remain overnight, but she refused. After that she was driven to the village station by your chauffeur, who left her there."

"Correct," said Spicer. "Come and speak to my daughter and to Selwyn."

Cinnaford was in the morning-room by himself when they went through, and he shook hands with some interest.

"Never met any of you Scotland Yard fellows before, Bragg, and I've had a considerable amount of experience in police work. I'll be glad to see you get to grips with this case."

"Where's Marion?" Spicer asked.

The young man chuckled. "I fancy some sort of culinary duty called, sir. Mrs. Poole came upstairs and they disappeared together. I gather that there was some question of ration cards to discuss. Mrs. Poole was perturbed."

"The inspector is checking up on Miss Elter," said Spicer, and turned the conversation over to Bragg.

Lord Cinnaford had no more to tell than the American, and the detective realized that there was nothing to be gained here. He was on the point of leaving when the door opened and a slim, pretty girl came in.

"My step-daughter," said Mr. Spicer.

Bragg rose to his feet gallantly. "I'm pleased to meet you, miss. Naturally I'm not here on a very happy errand, and I don't suppose that there is much more that you can tell me."

"I don't suppose so." She smiled a little and shook her head. "Poor thing. It seems so terrible. But then I suppose all these things only seem terrible when you encounter them personally. When you read about them you never seem to be able to appreciate the intensity of it all. You will have encountered this sort of thing so often that I don't suppose it will even impress you."

Bragg closed his eyes to emphasize how little murder did impress him. He opened them very quickly, for the girl said:

"The compact, Daddy! Did you tell Inspector Bragg about it?"

Bragg peered about him. "What compact?"

Mr. Spicer swore gently.

"Imagine me forgetting a thing like that! It was the one thing I had at the back of my mind all along." He told the story of the compact and the inspector was interested. When he came to the inscription on the gold plate, Bragg was excited.

"I'm very glad that you remembered this, Miss Campbell. You'll still have the compact with you?"

"Yes. Would you like me to get it?"

"I would like to take it away with me," Bragg confessed. "I'll give you a receipt for it, miss, and I'll be very much obliged if you could let me have it."

He sat down and wrote out a sentence or two on a page torn from his notebook and the girl went out of the room.

She came back in a moment or so, and her face was puzzled. "That's queer," she said. "I can't find it."

"What?"

She shook her head hopelessly. "I don't know where I've put it. I was positive that I had laid it in one corner of a bureau drawer. It wasn't very valuable and it never occurred to me that anything might happen to it. But of course nothing has. I've mislaid it—that's all. I'll find it later on, and I'll have it sent down to you at once."

Bragg stroked his chin. All the detective in him wanted to begin a search of his own, but propriety could not be evaded.

Mr. Spicer, however, had no scruples.

"Good lord, Marion, you can't have mislaid the thing! You told me last night that it was in your bureau drawer."

The girl was disturbed.

"Then someone has taken it out."

"Nonsense!" said her father pontifically. "It is still there. . . . A little flat thing, Inspector. . . ." He made a pantomime with his hands. "It has slipped under something. I shall find it."

He went upstairs and rummaged around for several moments, but there was no sign of the compact. He was on the point of going downstairs again when there was a rasping little sound outside the window.

He turned quickly and saw the movement of a ladder being withdrawn. In a second he had reached the window and had thrown it open.

Below him, standing on the sad, brown turf of the lawn, was Ferguson. For a moment he stared, and the big man caught his eye. In his own was a glint of insolence.

Mr. Spicer said: "What are you doing there, Ferguson?"

The chauffeur scowled.

"Cutting back the creeper, sir." The last word was tacked on as an apparent afterthought.

Mr. Spicer bridled. "Kindly remain there until I come down," he

said with some asperity. His head disappeared from the window and in a moment more he appeared on the lawn with Bragg and Cinnaford in close attendance.

Ferguson viewed them with hostile eyes.

"Something wrong—sir?"

Spicer said abruptly: "What are you doing on that ladder? Cutting back creepers is the gardeners' job."

The chauffeur looked amused.

"I always do the top bits. You'll notice that I'm a much taller man than either Grale or Kendal. They always get me to go round the window tops and under the eaves." He pointed upwards to the gable of the house and it was obvious that he was speaking the truth, for on the one side of the window the Virginia creeper was neatly trimmed, while on the ground there was a little pile of leaf clippings.

The man was laughing at them and Spicer was irritated. He said bluntly: "There has been an unpleasant incident here, Ferguson. A valuable compact has disappeared from Miss Campbell's room. It was in her bureau drawer only a short time ago."

They were not prepared for what followed.

Fury leapt into the man's eyes. "So you're suspecting me of stealing it?" he burst out. "Well, if that's what you've got to say to me you can go to hell—all of you!" His eyes were hot with anger.

Cinnaford said placatingly: "No one is accusing you, Ferguson." But the big man had thrown down the shears. "I don't have to take that sort of thing from you or anyone else, and I'm not going to. I'm quitting this job right now and——"

"Nonsense!" said Spicer angrily. "Dammit, you're not being suspected, but at the same time you've got to give the same account of yourself that any other person would have to give."

Ferguson shook his head. The anger was still in his eyes and in the pale, tight line of his cheeks. "I'm not being put off with any of your hanky-panky. I'm leaving here."

He turned and walked away.

Bragg detached himself from the group and walked after him. The big man had rounded the corner of the building when he became aware that he was being followed. He turned round and then stopped short.

Bragg caught up with him.

Ferguson put out a big hand and gripped him by the shoulder.

"What do you want?"

Bragg said: "Take your hand away." There was a cold ugliness in his tones. His blue eyes met the hot brown ones.

"Where have I seen you before, Ferguson?"

There was a little silence.

Ferguson licked his lips. "You've never seen me before," he said dully. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Sergeant Bragg—Scotland Yard. You are Ferguson—the chauffeur. I didn't see you in the servants' hall."

"Because I wasn't there," Ferguson said bluntly. "And I don't

know anything about this at all. All I can tell you, I can tell you in five seconds."

"That is as may be. . . ." Sergeant Bragg took out his notebook. "I'll have your statement, and remember that civility costs nothing. Talk to me like you did to Mr. Spicer and I'll have you down to the police-station before you can think about it."

Ferguson laughed unpleasantly. "Not me. You've got nothing against me, Sergeant, and I know my rights. I don't stand for any high-handed stuff, because I don't have to."

The little sergeant stabbed him in the chest with a thick finger.

"I don't want opinions. I want facts. I'm investigating a murder, and so far as I am concerned you were one of the last people to see this Miss Elter alive." His eyes narrowed. "Where were you last night, anyway—between eight o'clock and midnight, we'll say?"

He was not prepared for the effect his words caused.

Ferguson collapsed like a pricked balloon.

"Last night? I . . . I was in the house . . . most of the night. And then I went out . . . for a walk first. I'm fond of walking in the rain. I often go . . . anybody will tell you that."

He was submissive, cringing and terribly agitated. Bragg snapped his notebook shut.

"We'll hear about all that later. In the meantime, if you are a wise man you'll go back to Mr. Spicer and beg his pardon. Because if you give up this job you won't be able to leave the district until this case is cleared up. Do you understand?"

Ferguson nodded.

"Yes, sir. I understand."

He touched his cap and went sulkily on his way.

CHAPTER FIVE

"IF YOU TAKE MY ADVICE," SAID BRAGG, "YOU'LL PICK THAT FELLOW up. He's an ugly one all right!"

"If I take your advice," said McIver, "I'll probably be walking a beat again in a very short time. Anyway, we've got nothing against Ferguson."

"Except that he's got a record."

"How do you know that?"

Bragg looked at him like a wounded fawn. "Am I suffering from lack of vision or softening of the brain?"

"Possibly," said his dry superior. "But in the meantime we have more to do than discuss your various afflictions."

"The man is afraid of the police," Bragg said aggrievedly. "I know the type. Haven't I seen hundreds of them? As soon as he found out who I was he collapsed. Why? Because he was afraid I would pull him in and discover something about him that he didn't

want known. Mark my words, that fellow has seen the inside of a prison before this. All that show of anger with Spicer was just so much bluff. He was scared stiff and he wanted an excuse to get away. That looked as good an opportunity as any to him."

McIver considered this possible.

"I'll have a word or two with him and see what I think of him. Do you think that he stole the compact?"

Bragg shook his head.

"No—I don't. He's been at Grey Lodge for more than three years now. Spicer took him on along with the rest of the staff, and Spicer is a rich man. If Ferguson was on the hook, he'd have come across better pickings than a powder compact. He wouldn't be so big a fool as all that . . . besides, he never had a chance to take it. Spicer didn't notice it, but I did. The window was too small to let a man as big as Ferguson into the room."

"Pretty small window then," said McIver.

"It was on the gable," Bragg pointed out. "There was another bay window at the front of the house, but he hadn't been there. I know that, because the marks of the ladder would have been seen."

The inspector nodded. "Perhaps it was genuinely mislaid. They may come across it one of these days. I'd like to see it myself. If this girl Elter was married to Kelman as they seem to think, Kelman will have to do an awful lot of explaining."

"When you find him," Bragg said. "My theory is that Kelman is the murderer and that he's done a bunk."

McIver was exasperated.

"You sound like the chief inspector. You have a theory for every crime."

"Dimm? Don't mention that man to me!" Bragg got to his feet and walked across to the fireplace and lit a spill, and eventually a cigarette.

"You got the bullet?"

"The local doctor got it out. A .38. As a matter of fact it is on its way to New Scotland Yard at the moment, or should be if Moxon carried out my instructions."

"Johnny Harper used to use a .38," said Bragg reflectively.

"Johnny is dead," said the inspector. "You didn't know that, did you? Some time when you have a spare hour you ought to go over to Records and refresh your memory. A lot of water has flowed under Tower Bridge since Johnny Harper was using .38's."

"There are two Johnny Harpers," said Bragg. "I was referring to the other one. I don't suppose you have ever heard of him?"

"I don't suppose I have," agreed McIver. "And now I will give you something more important to do, because I've got a report to write and I want peace to work. Go down and interview Voyce again. Find out from him exactly when Guilder left the 'Grey Man'. I think he told me, but so many people tell me things that I can't remember them all."

Bragg was brisk.

"Guilder? The only Guilder I know is Joe Guilder."

"On that point we are agreed, then," McIver said. "For this is Joe Guilder, even though he called himself Gordon Woodbridge. I told you yesterday that Joe spent the night at Cinnaford. Apparently he put up at the 'Grey Man'."

Bragg was instantly alert.

"There's a coincidence! Something sticky there. You don't suppose that Joe did her in?"

McIver shook his head.

"I wish I could believe that. Unfortunately I don't. Joe isn't a killer. He hasn't got the heart for it. No. This is just what you call a coincidence. But it can bear cross-checking."

Bragg went downstairs, and in the bar met the little jockey, and crooked a finger in his direction.

"I want a word with you, Voyce."

The little man nodded. He was obviously worried at the notoriety that the murder was certain to occasion. "Come into the back room, sir."

He led the way to a cosy little room that opened off the bar. Here in the warm, pleasant glow, not to say fug, he stretched himself out in comfort.

Voyce poked up the fire. "Have something to drink, sir?"

"I don't mind if I do," said Bragg. "Not beer. I'm a spirit drinker except in the summer months. I'll have a very small one with no soda."

While he sipped it he asked his questions and Voyce was glumly eloquent. "It's a bad business, this, for me, sir, for I had a little trouble last year with the magistrates about my licence, and a thing like this won't help things at all."

Bragg made sympathetic noises.

"It ain't easy keeping a place like this free from talk. Every now and then something happens. Mind you, we do our best—both my wife an' me. No funny business here. None of your Mr. and Mrs. Smith from London for week-end with no baggage an' a Woolworth wedding ring. We're fussy—an' yet we've been done before."

"But this girl wasn't like that?"

Voyce shook his head.

"No—she wasn't. You can generally tell the type. A bit fluffier than this one was, and she was some looker. To tell you the truth I rather liked her—and so did my wife, an' Martha can pick out the wrong 'uns pretty well."

He went on to describe, with some intimacy of detail, his wife's ability to discriminate, and Bragg listened, intrigued. Presently he brought the conversation back to the matter in hand, and asked a pertinent question.

Voyce scratched the stubble of his chin.

"Mr. Woodbridge? Yes—we've had him once or twice before. He's a commercial, and every now and then he gives us a call. He started to come here first about two years ago. Since then we've had

him about half a dozen times. A pleasant gent and never gives much trouble."

"What does he travel in?" asked the interested Bragg.

"Mattresses."

"Imagine that now," said Bragg.

Voyce laughed dryly. "The funny thing is that to hear him speak you'd think he was dead keen on selling a mattress to everyone he met. But that's just his way, for last year we were putting in two new beds and I thought I would mention the matter to him, him bein' a customer like, and bein' in that line. However, he wasn't much interested, and told us that his firm's quota was taken up. It seemed queer for a business man to talk like that, but we just put it down to the war and the scarcity of things in general."

Bragg made a mental note for Mr. Guilder's confusion, then: "When did he leave here? Can you give me the exact time? I want you to be careful of this, because it's very important."

Voyce screwed up his face.

"You're lucky there, sir, for I can tell you exactly when Mr. Woodbridge left. He was just pulling out of here when Haycock—that's the village constable—came into the bar. That means that it was five minutes to nine, for he always comes in then to see things in order."

"I'll check that with Haycock," said Bragg. He rose to his feet and surveyed the bleak landscape as viewed from the window. It was raining heavily now, and a high wind was sweeping in from the east. Brown, tattered leaves floated heavily in the air and swirled their way to the sodden ground.

"Why is it that people have to commit murders in this sort of weather?" he grumbled.

Voyce had no answer to this query, and the little detective warmed his hands at the fire preparatory to taking his departure.

"That was very good whisky, Voyce; maybe you'll have one on me tonight. Thanks for your information." He was at the door when a new thought struck him and he came back.

"Do you know Ferguson?"

"The chauffeur at Grey Lodge?" Voyce was interested. "I should say I do."

"What sort of a man is he?"

Voyce shook his head. "I'm not one to belittle a man—but I don't like Ferguson. He's a bad-tempered devil and when he gets drink in him he's a fiend. He used to come down here quite a lot to do his drinking, and an ugly, sullen fellow he was. However, there ~~was~~ a spot of trouble one night and Haycock lifted him, and he hasn't come back since. Can't say I'm sorry, either, because he drank by himself and the liquor made him quarrelsome."

"What was the trouble about?"

"Some ill-feeling between him and Menteith, the head game-keeper at Cinnaford. Menteith had got him once with a brace of pheasants and had taken them from him, and I don't think Ferguson

was the sort of man who'd forget an insult. Anyway, he came at Menteith in the bar this night with an ale-bottle. Menteith had his stick with him and he dropped him where he stood. Then he went out and brought Haycock and charged him, only Lord Cinnaford got the charge dropped."

"Cinnaford?" Bragg stared in surprise.

"Yes. His lordship was sweet on Miss Campbell and Ferguson was their chauffeur. I guess that was what was behind it. Anyway, nothing more was heard of it and Ferguson didn't come back."

"Interesting!" said Bragg. "Where could I find this Menteith?"

"He lives in the cottage at Green Hill. You can see it from the road. I'll point it out to you if you like."

The innkeeper struggled into his coat and they went outside.

"About two miles away," said Voyce. "Beyond that big wood. You see that L-shaped bit, sir? That's the house behind it."

Bragg followed his pointing finger and nodded. There was a small stone house set here in silhouette and a road approached it from the village.

"You'll walk there in half an hour," said Voyce, and the policeman thanked him.

McIver was coming out of his room when he went back. "I've just had a message from Major Orde," he said. "Kelman telephoned him half an hour ago. He's in London at present, but he will be back here as soon as he can manage it."

They went out together and McIver took the road that led to Grey Lodge. "I think we might call on your friend Ferguson," he said. "In the meantime there is not much that we can do until Kelman arrives and I hate to waste time."

But when they reached Grey Lodge they were disappointed. Ferguson had left half an hour before to drive Mr. Spicer to London. Instead they met a charming, pale girl who received them in the big morning-room.

Mr. Spicer had received a sudden call from his solicitors and had left for the city within an hour of receiving it. Ferguson had come out of his pique sufficiently to ask Mr. Spicer's pardon, and they had left in the best of spirits, for the American was no man to harbour rancour.

"I'm rather glad of it," Marion Campbell told them. "Ferguson was a quick-tempered man and rather surly to most people, but he was always very nice to me, and on a good many occasions he went out of his way to be extra helpful."

"You like him then?" asked the inspector.

She considered this and nodded.

"I suppose I do. He is surly and difficult and yet he is a dependable man and a splendid chauffeur. I think he must be the best driver of a car I have ever met."

He asked another question and she shook her head.

"No. I've never heard him say. He's a very silent sort of person and never speaks unless he is spoken to. He was here when we came

and I've never heard anyone mention him at all." And then, "Why are you interested in him?"

McIver chuckled.

"I am interested in everybody, Miss Campbell. Candidly, though—we are not greatly concerned with Ferguson, and any interest that we do show in him he brought on himself by his own attitude. Bragg thinks that he may have a police record and that——"

The girl gave a little cry.

"A police record! You mean that he may have been in prison? Of course . . . that explains it!" She looked quite excited.

"What do you mean, miss?"

She said slowly: "I don't know whether I ought to tell you this or not. In a way it seems mean—but I suppose this is a serious affair."

"Murder is generally a serious affair," said McIver dryly.

She flushed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that. Anyway, Ferguson hates policemen. No, I'm not being rude. Policemen are an obsession with him. He never gives one a civil answer, and I always wondered why that should be so. Perhaps he has been in prison and that explains it."

McIver laughed. "I don't know that we are the most popular people, but most folk can at least tolerate us. I'm inclined to think that Bragg is correct and that Ferguson has a record. That would explain his animosity, wouldn't it?"

The clock on the mantel was chiming four, and there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. Joseph came into the room carrying a silver tray and the girl looked at him.

"You will wait and have tea?"

He shook his head.

"Thank you—no. I have a sergeant some place, and I feel that I ought to be collecting him. So far we have accomplished very little indeed, and I have a most exacting superintendent."

"You could leave immediately afterwards," she said, and McIver flushed.

"Very well, Miss Campbell, and thank you."

"See that Sergeant Bragg has tea downstairs," the girl said, and Joseph nodded his obedience.

Bragg he found in a small room off the kitchen, a god-like man with an interested audience. It was not every day that a Scotland Yard officer came to Grey Lodge, and he basked in a blaze of glory. He accepted the invitation to tea with a casual nod of indifference, and over the table waxed lyrical. He was an entertaining speaker, and he was never quite so entertaining as when he was describing his own romantic adventures. For half an hour the conversation was concerned with his own omniscience, his presence of mind and his speedy reaction in the face of every known form of danger.

A spellbound audience listened in breathless excitement while he described his struggle with a triple murderer, and only when the epic was concluded and the miscreant delivered to the Old Bailey did the tension relax.

There was a little whispering among the girls and someone giggled nervously. A voice said: "Did you ever meet a ghost, Superintendent?"

Bragg smiled his weary smile, and was on the point of describing ghosts that he had encountered when the detective in him rose to the surface.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Tell him, Liza."

A shy, red-faced girl was indicated, and Bragg turned his gaze upon her.

"Liza saw a ghost," one of the girls said. "Twice, she did. Tell the superintendent."

"It wasn't much!" The girl was uncomfortable, and obviously ill-at-ease at having attracted attention. "It was only a fright I got, sir, in the upper corridor. . . . Something like a shadow passed me and I gave a little scream." She looked upset. "You won't go mentioning that in the house, in case it comes to anyone's ears. Mrs. Poole would be angry if she knew I was talking to you about it."

"When was this?"

It had happened twice. The first occasion had been several weeks before. The girl had been dusting one of the bedrooms and had gone out into the corridor. She had been passing down towards the hall when she had felt a current of air. She had turned round and thought that she had seen the grey figure of a man cross the hall behind her.

Bragg was interested and made a suggestion, but the girl shook her head.

"No, sir. It wasn't anyone else. Mr. Spicer and Miss Campbell were in London last week, and apart from the gardeners and Ferguson there wasn't a man about the place, because Joseph had gone to visit his brother at Purley. Anyway, I went back, just out of curiosity, and the room I saw him go into was empty." She shivered a little. "It was sort of eerie, sir. But I just put it down to imagination. These old houses are full of shadows and corners, and they get you to imagining things."

"But you saw him again?"

She nodded. "Not any more than a week ago—and in almost the same place. I'd been dusting down Miss Campbell's bedroom and I went along the corridor and stood at the window for a minute or two. Gales was trimming a yew tree and I watched him for a minute, and then I sort of felt that draught of cold air, and when I looked round I thought I saw the grey figure again. Just like a shadow it was. Only this time it gave me a fright because I remembered the first time. I ran down to the kitchen here and I told Ella."

"She was as white as a sheet," said Ella. Herself, she was a buxom, solid-looking girl. She put her elbows on the table and regarded Bragg. "And she was shivering like a jelly. I gave her a cup of tea and we went and told Mrs. Poole."

Bragg had a recollection of this thin, acidulous person.

"What did she say?"

"Told us it was imagination, and that if we stopped reading a lot of nonsense and went to our beds at night we wouldn't be upsetting ourselves and other people." Ella made a wry face. "But that's like her, sir. You know what authority is like."

Bragg, who knew very well what authority was like, made a sympathetic noise.

The girl said: "Liza got a fright and she wasn't pretending. She was white for an hour after it, and she wakened up in her sleep and screamed. I know, because we share a room together. Anyway, none of us go up there after dark now, alone. And if we do have to go we get company and carry a light."

There was a little murmur of assent. Bragg listened and approved. He was interested, but not concerned, yet he was sufficiently good a detective to be curious. When he rose to go he had decided that the matter should be mentioned to McIver. That dry young man was an authority on ghosts of one sort and another.

He went out of the servants' hall and along one of the long corridors that led to the central hall. Here a coal fire burned brightly, and the warmth and cheer of it dispelled all spectral fancies. Joseph was moving around, drawing thick velvet drapes into position, tapping a cushion here, touching a fold there, for the onus of the black-out rested on his broad shoulders. He nodded in his stately way to Bragg and favoured him with a comment:

"A great nuisance, Sergeant. I think we shall all be very glad when it is all over."

"I would think so," said the conversational Bragg. He would have said more, but at that moment there was a diversion. A car drew up in front of the house and they heard it stop. In a moment more a bell rang.

Joseph made his stately way towards the door and the curious Bragg stood by.

It was a uniformed constable, and he carried an official buff-coloured envelope in his hand.

"A message for Inspector McIver," he began.

Bragg walked across towards him. "I'll take that." He held out his hand for it, and then a thought struck him. "How did you know to come here?"

"Major Orde told me to locate the inspector, sir . . . and Voyce at the 'Grey Man' thought he would be here. He saw you walk along the main Cinnaford road."

Bragg dismissed him graciously, and inserting a thick finger into the flap, tore the envelope open.

The message was brief. It was dated with that day's date, and he realized, as he read it, that the man who had written it had deemed it particularly important, and there was reason for this. Bragg looked round.

"Where is Inspector McIver?"

"In the morning-room," said Joseph. He indicated the way and

Bragg walked quickly along the hall. He went in unannounced and McIver got to his feet.

"I'm sorry, Miss Campbell . . . Is there something wrong?"

"Wrong?" Bragg was genuinely excited. "Let me tell you this, McIver, we're on to something. This is from Carmody, and listen to what he says :

"Inspector in Charge of the Elter Murder Case.

"Sir,

"I have made an examination of the bullet sent to me from Cinnaford. It was fired from a .38 revolver and the rifling and markings upon it show that it was fired from the same gun used when John Wellmead was murdered in the Belleami Bank robbery, and when Donald Walker was killed in the East Lothian Bankers' Trust hold-up. I will let you have fuller information at a later date.

"Sincerely,

"J. P. Carmody."

McIver stared for a long, long moment.

Bragg looked at the girl.

"Carmody is the sergeant in charge of ballistics, miss," he said.

The girl looked at them . . . from one to another.

"But what does it mean?"

Bragg said jubilantly : "It means that we know now who murdered Margaret Elter."

The girl gasped. "Who murdered Margaret Elter ! How clever of you ! Who was it ?"

McIver's cold laugh cut the tenseness of the air.

"If we knew that, Miss Campbell, we'd be the two cleverest men in England, for the man who used that gun is the cleverest criminal of the present day. We know him only as Grey Face."

"Grey Face !" she said.

And then the door of the room opened and Joseph came in. There was a thin little smile on his face.

"Mr. Kelman, Miss Campbell."

She stared at McIver, then .

"Show him in."

CHAPTER SIX

MARK KELMAN CAME IN SMILING. HE WAS A BIG MAN WITH A SHOCK OF silver hair and one of those curiously youthful faces so often seen among American business men. He came across and shook hands.

"Glad to see you, Marion ! Your father is in London. . . . Joseph told me."

She nodded and introduced the two detectives.

Kelman shook hands and he had a good grip. His hands were large and muscular and there was about him an air of keen, earnest vitality.

"I'm glad to meet you," he said. "I've always been interested in policemen. I'm a bit of a student of life, and a policeman knows more angles than most people. But I fancy that you are here on business, aren't you?"

McIver said: "Yes . . . we are." He looked around. "I wonder if I could have a few moments with Mr. Kelman in one of your rooms, Miss Campbell?"

"Certainly. . . ." The girl was quick to respond. "You may talk here, if you wish. As a matter of fact I have a few letters to write, and you will not be disturbed." She smiled around them and nodded. "I'll see you later, Mark."

Kelman opened the door for her.

"A great girl," he said in his effusive way. Then he closed it and came over and sat down by the fire. "I suppose you'll want to know what I can tell you about Margaret Elter, Inspector?"

McIver remained on his feet.

"Yes, if you please, sir. . . . I would like to know just as much about Miss Elter as you can tell me."

Kelman shrugged. "I'm afraid I'm not going to be much use," he said apologetically, and the Scotsman frowned.

"Possibly I will be the best judge of that."

Kelman smiled. "Actually there is nothing that I can tell you at all. Margaret Elter is only a name to me, and although I have employed her on various occasions in the last four or five years, I have only seen her on one occasion. That was in New York in 1938, and at that time I paid very little attention to her because she was not in my company at all."

McIver stared.

"You mean that you are not personally acquainted with this young lady, who flew from New York to meet you . . . who came down to Cinnaford solely for the purpose of seeing you, and who was so keen to contact you that she decided to remain in Cinnaford overnight, without having made any previous arrangements to stay?" His voice was tinged with scepticism, and the big man flushed.

"What are you getting at, Inspector?"

McIver said bluntly: "I'll tell you plainly that I don't believe you."

For a second he thought that the big man was going to take exception to the remark. Kelman's face went white, and then very slowly the colour flowed back.

He laughed shortly. "Perhaps you don't. The truth is that Margaret Elter is a woman whose services I have had to employ on various occasions. My connection with her was purely a business one"—and he smiled gently, and his voice became more mellow. "Margaret Elter was a private detective." He was watching McIver and he saw the inspector frown. "I know what you are thinking, Inspector. Private detectives are not much in favour in this country,

but in the States they perform a very necessary function. In England I think that they are pretty well restricted to handling divorce cases, but they have wider scope in America. Most big corporations are associated with a reliable agency, and the association usually operates to their mutual advantage."

"To what agency was Margaret Elter attached?"

Kelman looked amused.

"It used to be Cameron's," and here he named a firm whose reputation stood as high in its own particular sphere as does Christie's in the world of buying and selling.

Even McIver was impressed. "I've heard of them. She was not attached there at the time of her death?"

Kelman shook his head.

"No. I'm going to take you into my confidence a little bit, Inspector. You possibly know the line that I follow. I'm an 'agent', and that covers a pretty wide field. I handle deals . . . any sort of deal. In the old days, if you wanted a loan of half a million dollars, and you had the collateral, you came to me and I found you the money. If you wanted to buy a ruby or sell a yacht, I handled the deal. I've sold oil and I've bought tea and tin, and I've dealt with some of the biggest tricksters in the trade and none of them ever outsmarted me. I'll tell you the reason for that—I never went out on a job in my life without having my client thoroughly taped and measured in advance. I knew his weaknesses and his strengths. I knew the sort of things that he wanted to talk about. I knew if he had a son at college or a daughter with a couple of kids that he was crazy about. I knew if his hobby was trout-fishing or stamp-collecting . . . if he was hard up, or if he had all the money that he wanted. In short, I got results because I had my man weighed up in advance and I knew how to approach him. And to find out these sort of things I employed various people at various times. Sometimes it was Cameron's . . . sometimes Flynn's . . . but invariably it was a woman, because a clever woman can get a man to talk about himself at any time. Well—Margaret Elter worked for me for years without me coming into contact with her. Whenever I had a suitable job on hand I would telephone Cameron's and ask for her. It cost me plenty, but it was always worth it. She reported to me by letter . . . and there you are!"

He sat back and watched the younger man.

McIver frowned.

"I had looked for more than that, Mr. Kelman. The next move, I suppose, is to get in touch with Cameron's."

Kelman shook his head.

"That won't help you much, because I happen to know that she left their employ three or four years back. Before I saw her, in fact. As I mentioned already, I only saw her once. That was in the Roxy Restaurant on Broadway. I was with Lew Mathieson, the headquarters manager of Cameron's, this night, and she was sitting at a corner table along with a young man. Actually, I should not have

known her at all, but Mathieson noticed her and remarked to me that she was the operative who had attended to most of my business. I was interested enough to ask him a few questions, but there was very little that he could tell me. At that time he had recently been transferred to New York from a field agency in Chicago, and she was a stranger to him. I think he told me that she left Cameron's about a month after he took over. However, I could not be sure of that now. In any event, she had left him."

"Which agency did she go to?"

Kelman considered him.

"I don't think that she went to any. I still continued to employ her. She kept a box in the New York Central Post Office, and I wrote to her there. When I paid her, the cheque was made out to her personal account, and the money that I paid her was certainly ample. She could live comfortably on it."

"What do you consider ample?"

The American named a figure, and Sergeant Bragg, standing by the door, winced.

"Lived comfortably? I should think she would. Here's me, working myself to a shadow for enough to pay my income tax every year."

Kelman chuckled. "You ought to capitalize on your glamour, Sergeant." And then the laughter went out of his eyes and his voice became serious. "I want you to understand, Inspector, that I'll give you all the assistance that I can. If you want any information at all, come to me. If I can help you then I'll be only too pleased to do so. This girl was an employee of mine and she was working for me when she met her death and I'm prepared to accept both responsibilities and inconvenience."

McIver nodded.

"There is just one thing that I want to ask. Why was she so eager to see you?"

Kelman shook his head.

"You've got me there. I've been puzzling over that ever since Major Orde told me what he did." His blue eyes came up to the detective's frankly. "Whatever it was, it must have been something which she had come across and which had disturbed her, something she thought that I ought to know. That is the only solution I can arrive at, because the girl was not doing any actual work for me at the time that she met her death."

"You mean that this trip to England wasn't concerned with your affairs at all?"

Kelman nodded. "That is perhaps not quite true, but it is true enough to act as a starting place for you. Margaret Elter was certainly not killed because she was working for me. If you have that idea in your mind you can forget it. The work that she was doing for me was of an ordinary, routine nature and involved absolutely no danger, unless the danger of boredom can be included."

"She didn't die of boredom," said the inspector, and rose to his

feet. "We'll have to leave you now, sir, and thank you for what you have told me. Candidly I hoped for more, but what you have told me does open up a new avenue of investigation."

Kelman came out into the hall. "You're putting up at the 'Grey Man'? A comfortable place, and Voyce will be good to you. It is the oldest hostelry in Berkshire. You didn't know that, did you?"

"No." The inspector was smiling. "Don't tell me that you are an antiquarian, Mr. Kelman?"

"A little bit of everything," said Kelman modestly. "It's a funny thing that we Americans know more about England than the English. This particular part of the world intrigues me . . . but I'll tell you more about that later on. We'll be seeing quite a lot of each other for a time now. And remember what I have said. If I can be of any assistance to you, don't hesitate to ring me up. I may not be easy to find, because my business takes me about a good deal, but wherever I am I'm at your service. I'd give a lot to know the man who shot that girl."

The inspector chuckled.

"I can tell you that. His name is no mystery. Tell me where to find him and I'll thank you."

Kelman stared at him. There was a new respect in his voice when he spoke again. "You mean to say that you know who shot Margaret Elter? Who was he?"

"Grey Face!"

If he had expected the other to show surprise, McIver was disappointed.

"Grey Face!" The American repeated the words. "Oh yes! Your bank-robbing criminal. I won't ask you how you have arrived at that conclusion, McIver, because I don't suppose you would tell me in any case."

"As a matter of fact I shouldn't have the slightest hesitation. Margaret Elter was shot by the gun used in two of Grey Face's hold-ups."

The American whistled. For a second or two he was silent, and then: "That's a funny thing. But no—I can't see any connection at all." He stared at them both in perplexity. "You don't think that the girl had discovered something that concerned Grey Face? A man who has killed once or twice wouldn't scruple to kill again."

McIver shook his head. "I'm not theorizing at all, Mr. Kelman. Not until I know a little more about this business than I do at present. By the way, when did you hear of Elter's death?"

"This morning. I 'phoned Friar's Hall to ask if there had been a certain letter in the mail for me. My butler told me about the girl, and mentioned that she had called on me. As soon as I heard her name I knew that something queer had happened, and I 'phoned Orde. He told me what he could, and I came here at once."

The inspector nodded.

"Then I'll probably see you later, sir."

Marion Campbell was coming along the hall. She said: "I thought that I heard voices. I hope that you have managed to get

your business done. Daddy will be angry that he has missed you. Anything in the nature of a commotion has his heartiest approval. He'd follow a fire engine or a Black Maria for miles. I've tried to break him of the habit, but I'm afraid I had to give him up."

Kelman laughed. "Your father has never really got beyond the boyish stage, Marion. I wish I could be like him."

McIver took his leave. "You've been very helpful, Miss Campbell. Thank you very much."

McIver and Bragg went down the driveway together and Bragg remarked on the big car that stood in the shadows beyond the house.

"That will be Kelman's. What do you think of that fellow?"

McIver temporized. "I don't know. He had a pretty straightforward story to tell, and he doesn't look like a liar to me."

"Too glib!" said the experienced Bragg. "Too flash. That man has all the assurance in the world, and when I meet somebody like that it always starts me wondering what they've got to back it up with."

"If you start suspecting Kelman you'll find yourself in hot water," said McIver dryly. "Kelman is an important man—don't make any mistake there. He's on a score of British-American Relief Committees. He's a hustler—and he gets things done. There's always the odd chance that he may have an axe to grind, but name me any one man who hasn't in these enlightened days."

"Me," said Bragg smugly, and the Scotsman scowled.

"If the superintendent suspected one-half that I know about you, you'd be out of the Yard in a brace of shakes. It's one of the mysteries of life that you can remain there while really clever men are queuing up for jobs." And then the humour went out of his voice and he sounded genuinely worried.

"I'm not too pleased at the turn this case has taken."

Bragg was surprised.

"You mean about Grey Face? I thought that you'd be delighted. I know men who'd give their ears to get close to him."

But for the remainder of the way home the inspector was silent. They were approaching the village when Bragg bethought himself of the story he had heard in the kitchen, and he told it to the silent McIver, who was not impressed.

"I can't see that it comes into the case very much, can you?"

Bragg considered it.

"Maybe not. On the other hand, in a case like this you never can tell. If you hadn't had that letter from Carmody you'd never have said that Grey Face could come into it either. Anyway, it is interesting. It's one of those things—like Ferguson. It may not fit in, but then again it may. And while I'm on the subject I'm going to get Ferguson's fingerprints."

"You'll get yourself a thick ear," said the sarcastic superior. "Remember what Miss Campbell said. Ferguson doesn't like policemen. If I were in his shoes I don't think I should care much for them myself. Especially if the policeman happened to be you!"

"If you think I'm afraid," began Bragg, and McIver cut him short offensively.

"I don't think you're afraid. I've known you for eleven years now, and I've never known you to be afraid of anyone."

Bragg smirked. "It's something to hear you say that."

"It takes brains to know fear," McIver said, and Bragg subsided, hurt. He only looked up when they had reached the bend of the road, and the houses of the village clustered ahead of them in the gathering darkness.

A big car was drawn up in front of the 'Grey Man', and Voyce was talking to the man at the wheel. He looked towards them as they approached, and they heard his voice say: "No, my lord, I'm sure I couldn't tell you. I've been pretty busy this afternoon and naturally I don't pay much attention to cars passing here. Anyway, I wasn't out here in the yard till nigh on black-out time."

The man at the wheel nodded and the car leapt to life.

Voyce watched it turn out to the road.

"Lord Cinnaford," he said. "A pleasant young man, sir. I don't know why it is, but America always changes a man for the better. We've been lucky to have the likes of them around here. Mr. Kelman and Mr. Spicer and his lordship . . ."

"What did he want to know?" asked the practical Bragg.

Voyce looked at him. "Something rather queer. He wanted to know if I'd seen a black Bentley saloon pass here some time this afternoon. I couldn't give him any satisfaction there because I was busy."

"Who drives a black Bentley saloon around here?"

Voyce scratched his head. "Now it's funny you should ask that, sir, because I was just turning it over in my mind. His lordship himself drives one. Then there's Mr. Spicer. He has a Rolls and a Bentley as well. Mr. Kelman has a Bentley too . . . and then Colonel Chalmers at Woodend Manor has one, although his is an older model. I can't say I can think of any others. Most of the county people around have big cars . . . Rolls, Daimlers and the like."

They went inside, and over steak-and-kidney pudding Bragg put forward a theory.

"My opinion is," he said impressively, "that this Elter girl and Kelman were working a game together. I don't know just what sort of graft it would be, but you can rely upon it that it goes a little deeper than he suggested. Anyway, he sent for her, and when she came up he shot her. After that he drove back to London. How does that sound?"

"It sounds just like you do," said McIver unkindly, "and in the meantime we won't consider it. If we accept the fact that Kelman killed Margaret Elter entirely without evidence of any sort, then what are we to think about Grey Face?"

Bragg pursed his lips.

"Kelman is Grey Face."

"Is there anything in the world that Kelman isn't guilty of?" asked the incensed inspector.

After dinner he went up to his room and filled a pipe with tobacco, drew in his chair and sat down before a cheerful fire to concentrate on the problem that the case presented. For a long, long time he remained there wrapped in thought, and it was the sound of the radio being switched on that brought him to a realization of the time. He listened to the sonorous thunder of Big Ben, and then heard the muted voice of the announcer reading the news.

For a moment he hesitated, and then he rose to his feet and went downstairs. The bar was almost empty. Two lean, old men sat on oaken chairs and looked up at him hopefully.

Voyce came from the regions of the kitchen and said: "Were you wanting anything, sir?"

"Only my sergeant."

"Mr. Bragg went along to Charlie Budd's," said Voyce, and added the information that Charlie Budd was the local carrier and that he journeyed to the end of the world, sometimes going as far afield as Reading and occasionally venturing to Winchester. Usually he brought home an evening newspaper. These facts he had already communicated to Bragg.

McIver nodded his thanks. He was on the point of reaching for his raincoat when the hotel door opened and Bragg made a dramatic appearance.

The little sergeant had been running, for he was out of breath when he appeared. He carried a newspaper in one hand, and there was a well-remembered glint in his eyes.

McIver, who had seen it before, groaned.

"Whatever it is—tell me and get me out of this suspense."

The sergeant said: "Come upstairs. I've got something to tell you!" He made for the stairway and the tall inspector tagged on behind him.

When they got to the room Bragg closed the door, opened the clothes closet and peered inside.

"If you tell me what you're looking for I'll give you a hand," McIver volunteered.

Bragg shot mysterious glances around him, dropped his voice to a thick whisper.

"He's cropped up again!"

"Who?"

"Grey Face!" He drew the newspaper out from under his arm.

"Listen to this!" He fumbled for the paragraph.

"GREY FACE AGAIN!

HOLD UP OF EQUITABLE TRUST

DARING DAYLIGHT ROBBERY!"

"Good lord!" said McIver. He took the paper from his subordinate.

Another daring robbery was carried out today in broad daylight when a masked man entered the Lombard Street offices of the Equitable Trust and forced the manager to call for cash from the vaults at the point of a gun. Mr. Hadbury, the manager, stated to a *Chronicle* man that the robber gave him no opportunity to call for help. Seventeen thousand pounds are missing and . . .

He read down a little farther.

Police detectives from Central Office headquarters were quickly on the scene and a cordon was thrown around the district immediately, but Grey Face again managed to elude capture.

There was a little more. At the foot of the column there was a line in italics which read (*page 3, column 4*), and the inspector leafed over the paper. A headline caught his eye:

WELL-KNOWN YARD MAN ON ROBBER'S TRACK (Exclusive to the *Chronicle*)

In the absence of Superintendent Harry Lynd, owing to temporary indisposition, this latest outbreak of violence will be in the capable hands of Chief Inspector Dimm of New Scotland Yard. Chief Inspector Dimm will be remembered as the officer who solved so successfully the Batten Murder Mystery. It is thought by experienced men at New Scotland Yard that this astute and able officer will bring a new and more forceful point of view to tackle an old and thorny problem. . . .

There was more, but McIver did not read it.

Bragg did, and he shook his head in admiration. "He must have written it himself. Lord love a duck! That man delights in himself. He'll be lucky if he keeps his pension after this. That *Chronicle* reporter must owe him a lot."

That was in McIver's mind as he prepared for bed. That and one little fact. There was going to be trouble in this case before he was many days older. That much he could already foresee. He had only worked on one case with Chief Inspector Dimm, and his recollection of that was not a happy one. For Dimm was hectoring and inefficient and tremendously important.

He switched out the light and unfastened the black-out. The rain had slackened and the night was clearing. A thin rind of moon was heaving among the storm-tossed clouds and a breath of sweet cool air filled the room.

"Damn!" he said aloud, and got into bed. And not for all the world would he have admitted that the cause of his unhappiness was anything other than the new threat of Chief Inspector Dimm.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SELWYN ST. DAVID SAT ON THE TRUNK OF A FALLEN TREE, AND FROM his point of vantage he could see the broad sweep of the lands that

were his and had been his ancestors' through the ages. The broad acres of Cinnaford stretched out before him, and where the weald dipped to the river the woods and forest of Sellington stretched blue-green as far as eye could travel.

The high gables of Cinnaford Chase rose up on his left. At one time the house had been the home of a holy order, and in its earliest days it must have been almost mercilessly austere. But time had crumpled and softened the edges of the grey stone towers and toned its bleak grey with an orange and yellow curtain of lichens.

Successive tenants had made alterations and additions. Walter St. David, second Lord of Cinnaford, had built a new wing when the last James was still on the throne, and to this Jacobean edifice a Hanoverian Cinnaford had made his own improvements. But the bell-tower in which generations of pigeons had hatched out their infinite progeny had been old when the Lion Heart had levied England for the funds to fight the courteous Saladin, and had gazed down in its youth over shaven aesthetics as they bent over their devotions in the open gardens.

The kindly ivy had glossed over the touching points, so that new blended into old, and a curtain of jasmine and magnolia and blood-red Virginia creeper covered the old walls that had seen history. Behind, rose up a mountainous verdure of cedar and spruce and sweet-smelling balsam, and the skeleton branches of the great Cinnaford beeches.

The rain of the day before had given way to frost and the air was cold and clear, the sun a red ball in the east. Somewhere above a 'plane droned its way northward and a venturesome cock pheasant picked its way towards him over crisp grass.

Cinnaford sat still. There was a vague contemplation in his eyes. So might the Abbot of Cinnaford have sat eight hundred years before when the Norse invaders were burning their way across the face of England.

Marion Campbell was thinking that as she came out of the copse and across the dead bracken towards him.

The crisp sound of her footsteps caused him to turn, and he was on his feet in a second.

"Good morning, Marion. I didn't expect to meet you here."

The girl laughed. She was a vision of breath-taking loveliness this morning, for the coolness of the air had brought a glow to her cheeks and a sparkle to her grey eyes.

"I saw you from the wood and I had to come across. Daddy was with me but he wouldn't come. He had some correspondence to attend to."

She sat down beside him.

"Give me a cigarette, Selwyn."

He was a little surprised, for she seldom smoked.

When it was lit she said: "These are the mornings one remembers, Selwyn. When I was a little girl I used to spend the spring and the autumn of every year in Kentucky. Were you ever there?"

He shook his head. "Unfortunately I had a living to earn when I was in the States. It was the cities for me."

She sighed. "This makes me think of it. The great, massive woods behind the big frame house, centuries-old oaks and maples, walnuts and elms. Great majestic trees that seemed to cloud the sky. Those great, mossy roots we used to play around . . . and then the little glades of wild rye and buffalo grass . . . and the perfume of pennyroyal and wild grapes . . . and wild mint. I mustn't forget the wild mint because it was the nicest of them all."

Cinnaford laughed.

"I think you are a very little girl yet, Marion." And then he tossed his cigarette away. It made a little arc of smoke in the air. "Have you seen any of our detectives this morning?"

She shook her head.

"No. I had them both at the Lodge yesterday. Inspector McIver impressed me very much. The little man is nice too." Her eyes clouded over. "It's so horrible. That poor girl! She couldn't have been much older than I am."

He did not answer this. Instead he rose to his feet.

"I'll walk back with you as far as the Bailiff's Gate, young lady. After that—it is a matter of work. I've been kept busier since I came back to England than ever I was in my life. By the way, have you seen Mark?"

"Mr. Kelman?" She nodded. "He came in yesterday and waited for dinner. He is terribly cut-up about the whole thing. He had to make a statement to the police, of course."

He was interested.

"Poor old Mark. He's busy enough without anything like this turning up. If I had time I'd pop over and see him this morning, but old Davey is coming up about those blessed rents."

"Telephone and put him off," she suggested.

The scion of a noble house shook his head.

"That's no use. I've tried it. He just comes. He's been coming up here every Friday morning for sixty-two years, he told me, and nothing is going to stop him."

The girl laughed. "I'm afraid that's one of the responsibilities of your position, Selwyn." They were approaching a stile now, and across it was the road and the Bailiff's Gate.

He helped her across and remained on his own side of the hedge.

"No, I mustn't come over. If I did I'd find myself wandering up to Grey Lodge, and that wouldn't do at all."

He took his leave of her and went back to Cinnaford Chase, and here in his library he met a man who had less time to spare than himself.

Mark Kelman carried in his big frame that buoyant sense of vitality which keeps men young at any age. He was standing impatiently by the window when the younger man came into the room and said :

"Morning, Selwyn. . . . I've been here for so darn long now, I was beginning to think I'd missed you."

Cinnaford had brightened up considerably.

"Glad to see you, Mark. This place is driving me nuts. No . . . I'm not kidding you there." And he saw Kelman look at him in astonishment. "For a row of beans I'd chuck it all up and go back to the States. I'm fed up!"

"Not with Marion Campbell?"

"Good lord, no! She's the one bright spot in an ocean of darkness." Cinnaford lit a cigarette. "You don't understand. You're on the move all the time, Mark. You're kept busy and you're never long enough in one spot to get really fed up. I'm different. Being a lord may have its advantages, but it carries its responsibilities too."

"We've all got our responsibilities," said the sententious Kelman. "Look at me——"

"Never mind you," Cinnaford grumbled. "Look at me. I was never brought up for this sort of life. You've got to be educated to it. I'm too much of a rough-neck."

The big man laughed.

"You'll get the corners rubbed off you before long." He walked over to the window and looked out. "It must be kind of nice too, I guess, to stand here and think that you own every foot and inch of the ground that you see. Twenty-nine thousand acres here and twenty thousand in Yorkshire!" He shook an admiring head. "I don't envy you, but I respect you."

Cinnaford changed the subject.

"A pretty girl that . . . Margaret Elter. I'm sorry it happened."

"Very," said Kelman shortly. "But I didn't come here to discuss Margaret Elter. That's a matter for the police to handle, and by the look of things they'll make short work of the job."

"I don't know." Cinnaford was suddenly serious. "I've had a lot more experience in murder cases than you have—possibly more than they have. And I've always noticed that the case that looks the simplest contains the most snags. I'm going down to the village to-day to have a few words with McIver."

"Have you got a theory?" asked the interested Kelman.

"I wouldn't say that. But Margaret Elter came to Cinnaford to see you. It seems reasonable to suppose that she was murdered either because she was bringing you information or because she was carrying something that was particularly valuable. In either event I think it seems clear that she must have been followed to Cinnaford from London. Now my theory is that the murderer knew that she was coming here, and came up by car."

Kelman chuckled.

"I don't know how he came, but there may be something in that. Most people who come from London and who don't travel by train come by car."

Cinnaford ignored his sarcasm. "As a matter of fact I've been making a check of the cars that have passed through here in the last

day or two. Apart from Mr. Spicer, you and I and the folks at Wood-end, the road isn't much used at all. Voyce was telling me last night that on Wednesday when he was cleaning up his paths that he spent the whole afternoon at the front of the 'Grey Man' and that only one car passed through Cinnaford. If that is the case, it is quite possible that a car would be noticed. Anyway, that's the line I'm working on."

Kelman was amused.

"I don't think you'll have much success there. The killer came by night, and Wednesday was a wet night. Ten to one no one noticed the car, and it's a hundred to one that even if it had been observed, the man who saw it could not describe it."

He got to his feet and showed that he was about to go.

"Stay for lunch," Cinnaford invited, but the older man shook his head.

"Not today. I'm going back to London tomorrow and I've got little enough time to spare. If this hadn't happened I'd have been in Scotland today. However, I'll have to give the police a day or two."

"You're a busy man." Cinnaford laughed.

Kelman nodded. "If I wasn't kept busy I'd die in a week. I like to be on the move, and even if I didn't have to be on the hop, I think I'd kid myself into it for the sheer love of movement."

He went out into the gloomy old corridor and Cinnaford followed at his heels. He was going down the big marble stairway when he suddenly said :

"McIver tells me that Grey Face killed the girl."

"Margaret Elter?" Cinnaford was genuinely astonished. "I didn't know that. Good lord . . . it sounds like a shilling thriller."

"When you've lived as long as I have you'll realize that all life reads like a shilling thriller." Kelman stepped out into the crisp morning air. Then he looked back and his shrewd eyes were on the younger man. "Are you surprised that Margaret Elter should come within the scope of Grey Face?"

Cinnaford laughed. "I can't say that I am. I don't know much about him. He's the bank-robbing fellow, isn't he? Bank robberies are so few and far between in England that they are inclined to surround their perpetrators with an air of false romance. That point of view is fatal if you want to catch them."

Kelman agreed.

"If they had as many bank robberies in this country as we have in New York alone, they'd soon have a different slant on things. But a bank is an ultra-respectable place here and no decent Englishman would ever think of robbing one."

There was a path that led from the Chase through the woods of Cinnaford to Friar's Hall. He waved his farewell and made his way along this. Half an hour later he was in the grounds of his own not inconsiderable house, and as he approached the building he saw a familiar figure.

Bragg was pacing the gravel walk that led up to the house, and he did not look up until Kelman was close at hand. When he did, his

eyes were a little puzzled. He waved his hand. "Good morning, sir. . . . You've been having an early walk?"

Kelman felt unaccountably annoyed. Had this grubby little man been spying on him?

"I was at Cinnaford Chase," he said shortly.

"I know." Bragg nodded his bullet head. "I saw you go and I followed you part of the way. Then I came back here because McIver had one or two questions he wanted answered."

Kelman's sense of annoyance grew.

Bragg said suddenly: "Do you smoke a pipe, Mr. Kelman?" And when the American stared at him in surprise, "Yes, I mean that."

"Never! If I can't get cigars, I smoke a cigarette. Why do you ask?"

For a moment he thought that Bragg had not heard him. Then the little man crooked his finger. "Come here!"

Mystified, Kelman followed him off the path and across the cool, crisp lawn. They approached the building and then Bragg stopped in front of a ring of beech trees.

"What do you make of that?"

Kelman saw what he pointed at with a start, for here the ground was trampled fairly flat and there were the impressions on the soft moss of a man's feet. Half a dozen spent matches lay about the grey, thick roots, and Bragg bent down to pick up a sodden, pulpy mass. He held it out and Kelman wrinkled his nose. "What is it? Tobacco?"

"Someone has been putting in a little time here," the detective said. "The question is—who was he and why was he here?" He looked around him. "It's obvious enough that he was watching the house—but what was he watching for?"

"Heaven knows!" said Kelman. He seemed a little shocked. "It couldn't have been one of the keepers—but no . . . That's impossible. They wouldn't have any reason to hang about here." His eyes wrinkled. "What's your opinion?"

Bragg smiled a mysterious smile.

"Whatever it is—I'm keeping it for the moment. I'm meaning no offence, sir—but this is a murder case."

He walked round the trees. "You'll notice, Mr. Kelman, that whoever he was, he had an uninterrupted view of the house. What was he watching for? I'd give a lot to know that."

Kelman led the way back to the house. "You've surprised me," he admitted, "and I can't say that the surprise was pleasant. I'll find out from the gardeners if anyone has been seen around here."

Five minutes later they were walking through the kitchen gardens and here they met a grim old man with Dundreary whiskers. He listened to what Kelman had to say and then shook his head.

"No . . . I've seen naebody. Doon by the big beeches, ye say. Well, Adam was rakin' leaves there on Tuesday, so if ye fun' matches they were drapped afterhin'."

They found Adam, a lean old man who corroborated the head gardener's opinion.

"I was sweeping up and tidying up all round the verges, sir, and I'd have noticed anything like that. And even if I had missed it, McFarlane wouldn't have when he came round to see what I'd done."

They went back to the house together, Kelman a little more upset than he tried to make out. "It does look as though someone had been watching the house," he admitted, "and the chances are all that it was on Wednesday. And if it was Wednesday it seems a queer coincidence that Margaret Elter should arrive and later meet her death."

"I've seen your butler," said Bragg. "A very pleasant old man, but I can't say he seemed very helpful."

"Old Pine?" The American chuckled. "Say, that old fossil has been asleep for the last twenty years. You won't get much out of him."

They had a drink together and Bragg went back to the village to report, and here he found his thoughtful inspector reading over a typewritten letter. He looked up when the sergeant came in and then: "What did you get?"

"Very little. I saw the butler. Pine, his name is . . . one of the old school." Bragg gave a pantomime of one of the old school and McIver said patiently:

"When you've finished with your display of histrionics, we'll have your report."

"I took a note of the old man's statement, but it doesn't differ from what we got from the Berkshire police. He didn't pay very much attention to the Elter girl at all. About all he knows is that she was disappointed that Kelman wasn't there."

"Naturally."

Bragg smirked. "I've got a little information of my own, however. You know how I seem to see things that any other man would pass by? Well, this came to me in a queer way——"

"And I suppose you'll tell it in a queer way."

Bragg turned on him the look of a wounded fawn. "If you'll let me tell my story in my own fashion, we'll get somewhere," he said huffily, and the tall inspector listened to what he had to say.

"Someone watching Kelman." McIver was interested. "Now who could that be? You say that Kelman seemed upset?"

"He was shocked," said the imaginative Bragg. "Naturally he tried to cover it up, but I could see how he felt. It's a funny thing about me, but I always notice that sort of thing——"

"The funny things about you are legion," snarled the incensed McIver. "Get on with the story."

"If you've ever seen an upset man . . ."

Bragg stopped and rose to his feet. A car was approaching the hotel, and when he got to the window it was just pulling into the converted courtyard.

He saw a burly man climb out and straighten himself to his full height, and his exclamation of dismay brought the inspector to his feet.

"What's wrong?"

"Everything," said Sergeant Bragg.

And McIver, looking down upon the important bulk of Chief Inspector Dimm, was for once in agreement.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHIEF INSPECTOR DIMM CAME UPSTAIRS AND WAS A LITTLE INCENSED that they had not shown him the courtesy of meeting him in the courtyard. He had a complaint to make about the report that the inspector had telephoned through, and he was annoyed that a fire had not been lit in his room.

Later on he mellowed.

"You'll understand that I'm entirely in charge of this Grey Face business, McIver. Anything you've found out you can hand over to me. Superintendent Lynd is ill."

"I read about it in the *Chronicle*," said McIver coldly.

Dimm smirked. "They had rather a good article on me in the *Chronicle*," he remarked nonchalantly. "I don't know how some of these reporter fellows get their facts. That sort of thing embarrasses a man."

"I should think it would," said the candid Scot, and Dimm frowned. "I'm having something to eat in my room. While I am eating you can tell me what you know."

"While you are eating, I also will be eating," said McIver, and the chief inspector had the grace to be apologetic.

After lunch they forgathered in the chief inspector's room and went over the case. When McIver had finished, Dimm nodded. "Then it boils down to this, McIver. This girl Elter arrived at Cinnaford ostensibly to see Kelman. Later on she was found murdered. Has Kelman an alibi?"

McIver was startled.

"If you think that Mr. Kelman murdered her, I'm afraid you're wide of the mark."

Dimm made a lordly sign with his hand. "Take it from me, McIver, Mr. Kelman is going to be put through it . . . and if he hasn't got an alibi—he's for it."

McIver smiled bleakly.

"Kelman was at Sheerness on Wednesday night. I have already checked that part of his story and it is true. I sent Marsden to Sheerness to push the inquiry, and he reported to me by telephone. Kelman put up for the night at the Charles Stuart House and returned to London in the morning, where he heard of the murder. What he did at Sheerness I do not know, but I hope to be fully posted when Marsden comes back."

Dimm stroked his fair moustache.

"I'll handle him," he said, and McIver smiled bleakly. He rose to his feet. "You'll find my report contains almost everything that we have turned up so far. There are one or two outside points which don't really come into the case at all, but which I have made a note of."

"Such as what?"

McIver told the story of the compact, and Dimm was thunder-struck. "Good heavens! A piece of valuable evidence and you allowed it to disappear like that . . . under your very nose. Why, that might have been enough to hang Kelman."

"We have no evidence to show that the 'Mark' who was married to Margaret Elter is Mark Kelman."

Dimm shook his head and tut-tutted annoyance.

"You young fellows are all alike. It's as plain to me as anything could be. Of course she was his wife. Why else was she coming here?"

"You've read my report. He doesn't admit it."

Dimm fluttered his hands. "What of it? Did you expect that he would? That sort of man never admits anything."

McIver made a welcome escape. Downstairs he found Bragg eating chocolates and the little detective looked up when he heard his footsteps on the stairs.

"How is he?"

"About the same as usual. Perhaps a little more so. I left him reading my report."

Bragg sniffed.

"I hope it was written in awfully easy words of one syllable. By the way, did you mention me in it?"

"You?"

"You have received valuable information from me," Bragg said composedly. "Last time I was on a murder case was with Inspector Pelton, and the only place my name was mentioned in his report was in the opening sentence when he wrote: 'Accompanied by Sergeant Bragg, C.I.D., I left for Brampton. . . .' I know my rights. If a man can't look after his own interests he'll never get very far. Where are you off to?"

McIver said: "I'm going back up to Grey Lodge. There are one or two people I'd like to speak to there."

"Miss Campbell?" asked the romantic Bragg.

"If you are talking about the future Lady Cinnaford you'd better be careful. Walls have ears, and this place is a typical English village. You know what that means."

Bragg glanced around. "I should just think I do. If you like I'll get my coat and come up with you."

"Thank you for your condescension," said McIver. He went to the door and in a moment or so Bragg followed him out. They took the high road that led to Grey Lodge conscious that the interested eyes of the village were upon them.

Mr. Spicer met them at the Lodge gates, and insisted on turning the car which he was driving and taking them up to the house. He was

annoyed at having been away from home on the previous day, and mentioned this annoyance several times on the drive up.

"To think that I've been moping around here for weeks," he said, "and when a thing like this happens I have to be in town." He pulled the big car up and got out. "Come inside, Inspector, and make yourself at home. Anything I can do to help . . ."

"I'm sure of that, sir," said McIver. He asked a sudden question and Mr. Spicer shook his head.

"Ferguson? No . . . he asked for a day off today. He went up to town by the early train."

"That is interesting," said McIver quietly.

Bragg was impressed. "I wondered at first if he'd had another shindy and quit." And the millionaire laughed.

"Not him. Whatever you said to him the other day it cooled him off a bit. He came round to me as apologetically as you like. I was glad enough too, for the man is a good driver, and he was over Army age. Men are pretty hard to get these days." He commented at some length on just how difficult men were to get, how inordinately ungrateful they turned out to be when one did get them, and added that in his opinion things would be different after the war.

Inside, Bragg went his own way. In the kitchen he found the competent Joseph and made a suggestion to which the butler was agreeable.

He had a little pantry, he admitted, and he led Bragg to it; a small, comfortable room furnished with two armchairs and a morocco table. There was a coal-fire burning in the hearth, and when the door was closed he accepted a cigarette from Bragg's case and leaned back.

"I can't tell you a great deal about him," he admitted. "He is a very reserved man. He came here about three years ago when Mr. Lennon was living here."

"Mr. Lennon?"

"He's dead now, poor gentleman." Joseph gazed into the red heart of the fire. "He was the tenant of Grey Lodge for a good many years. An old man, he was, and pretty shaky on his legs. He took a shock before he died and Ferguson and I used to have to carry him downstairs every morning."

Bragg was not interested in Mr. Lennon and consigned him to oblivion.

"What's your opinion of him then?"

"Of Ferguson? I can't say I care for him much. He has a very bad temper and once or twice he's got into trouble. No—nothing serious . . . but he flares up suddenly."

"Ever have any visitors?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did you ever hear where he came from before he turned up here?"

"I can't say that I did." Joseph was a little puzzled at the turn the questioning was taking. "You surely don't think he had anything to do with it?"

"You never know," said Bragg wisely. "Does he sleep here? In the main building, I mean."

Joseph shook his head. "Only the women are here. I have a bedroom over the garage and Ferguson has the room next to mine."

"And when he isn't driving he spends his time in his room?" suggested Bragg.

Joseph was not so sure on this point.

"I couldn't say much about that. Actually I think he is fond of walking because I've known him to go out some nights after I have gone to bed."

"So late as that?" Bragg was shocked.

"Yes . . . between eleven and midnight. When he comes back I don't know, because I am generally asleep. One night, however, I do remember, for I was wakened by him stumbling on the stairway with his heavy boots. I looked at my alarm clock and it was about four. I mentioned it to him in the morning and he was most unpleasant."

"Get away!" said Bragg. It was a stock expression of his and indicated horrified amazement. "He didn't say where he had been till that hour in the morning?"

"He told me that it was no business of mine when he came in." Joseph was a little indignant. "However, I didn't let him get away with it. Once you let servants get the better of you, you lose your hold over them. I told him frankly that it wasn't any concern of mine at all, but that it was a concern of his lordship's, and that if word was brought to his ears he wouldn't be very well pleased."

"His lordship?"

"Grey Lodge belongs to Lord Cinnaford."

Bragg shook an admiring head. "I'll bet that quietened him."

Joseph nodded. "It did. He was quite pleasant after it and apologized for waking me. . . ." He looked at the mantel clock, and coughed. "I usually take a little refreshment about this time," he suggested, and Bragg's heart was warmed to him.

"I wouldn't mind a spot myself," he said graciously.

The man rose and produced a bottle from his cupboard. From a shelf he took two glasses and a syphon of soda.

"I'll have mine neat," said the detective, and watched the bottle deftly up-ended.

There was a pleasant little gurgle.

Bragg sipped the whisky daintily. "Very nice indeed. Very, very nice."

They spoke for a moment or two on other matters, and then Bragg brought the conversation back to a more practical basis. He made a suggestion, and the man hesitated.

"I don't know about that. If it was a matter of an arrest or anything like that I'd give you all the help I could, but Ferguson has his rights. Anyway, suppose he found out?"

"He won't," said the confident Bragg.

Joseph pondered the question.

"So far as I'm concerned," he said slowly, "I'll have nothing to do with it. You know where his room is—and if you can find a way in you can look around if you please. So far as I'm concerned I know nothing about it."

This suited Bragg. He rose to his feet and heard Joseph utter a final word of warning. "You'd better be careful that none of the girls see you, or the fat will be in the fire. Talk goes round a big house like wildfire."

"Trust me!" said Bragg. He winked an expressive eye.

The garage was close to the house, and after reconnaissance he discovered that there was a door in the wall of the kitchen gardens which opened immediately behind the building. He made his way unobtrusively through this exit and took stock of the garage which served Grey Lodge.

It was a weather-beaten old building with half-timbered gables on which the ivy grew high. At one time horses had been stabled here, and about the place there was a slightly lost air of the past. He went in, expecting at every moment to hear a soft whinny and to see a white-starred nose peering out of a loose-box.

There was an entrance-way on the opposite gable. This was the door that Joseph had described, and he went upstairs quietly. There was a little landing from which six doors opened, facing each other in threes, and from Joseph's description he found the door he was seeking and tried the handle.

It was locked.

Locked doors were no bar to Bragg. He produced a leather key set and eventually a key, tried it in the lock, and in a moment more was in the room.

It was surprisingly large and comfortable. A fire was set in the fireplace and the room had the finicky sense of neatness of the bachelor, which consists in placing everything at equal distances from everything else.

There was a comfortable armchair, a heavy iron bedstead and a bed that was neatly and efficiently made. There were no pictures on the bare wall, but a photograph stood on a polished cabinet.

Bragg went across and picked it up. It was the picture of a girl of another age. He saw a high-necked blouse and a tight-waisted skirt. The woman was young and, in her way, pretty. She had a wealth of fair hair and full, sensuous lips. Across the bottom of the card was written:

To Jim with love. Dora.

Dora?

Who was this Dora? Was she Ferguson's wife . . . or his sweetheart? Bragg put the photograph down almost guiltily.

He opened a drawer.

Ferguson's clothing was laid out so neatly that it might have been

the prize kit in a barrack-room inspection. The shirts were folded tidily and placed in one corner, the socks in another.

The detective did not disturb them. He opened drawer after drawer, and it was not until he came to the last one that he found himself baulked. This small drawer was locked, and yielded only to the persuasion of his set of keys. When he did open it, he found it contained only a black-japanned box and an assortment of pencils and pens.

The box was heavy. He took it out, weighed it in his hand, and made the surprising discovery that it was unlocked, although the lid fitted very tightly. He manœuvred it open and inside lay a packet of papers and letters held together by an elastic band. He drew off the band and examined them. On top was a chauffeur's licence made out in the name of Henry Ferguson. There was an old, yellowish envelope and inside it a newspaper clipping. He took it out and gazed at it curiously.

It was a wedding announcement and had been cut from some provincial newspaper. He read:

WILSON—BAKER.—At Ormsby Congregational Church on Tuesday, June 21st, Peter Westwood Wilson, son of Inspector John Wilson, of the Ormsby Borough Police Force, and the late Mrs. Wilson, of Ellerton Park, to Dora, only daughter of Sergeant James Baker and the late Mrs. James Baker, 51 Gore Avenue, Ormsby. The Rev. Paul Magwood officiated.

Dora Baker! Obviously the Dora of the photograph. What old tragedy lay behind those few printed words? What heartbreaking memories did the age-old clipping call up to this hard-eyed man?

Beneath this was a soiled sheet of paper, and this he lifted and read:

**CERTIFICATE OF TRANSFER OR RETRANSFER TO THE ARMY RESERVE
DISCHARGE OR DISEMBODIMENT:**

Army Number: 2626602

Name: FENDER, JAMES HENRY.

He read on, turned the sheet over to where the one word 'Testimonial' caught his eye.

A clean, honest and sober man who has incurred only one entry in his conduct sheet during his service with the colours. An industrious soldier who has risen to the rank of full sergeant and who can be recommended to any position of trust.

James Henry Fender!

Bragg whistled aloud. So Henry Ferguson was James Henry Fender? And then, at the bottom of the box, he saw something that made his heart leap. He took it out and knew what it was before he had lifted it . . . a bank deposit book, and inside it a cheque book. He leafed it over.

The cheque book was new and was on the Great Southern Bank.

It had not been used at all, and this was disappointing. But the pass-book itself was more fruitful. He opened it up and drew a long breath at the size of the account.

Three thousand four hundred and seventy pounds !

That was a large amount for a chauffeur. Bragg, who had no scruples, made a note of it and put the book back. He returned the box to the drawer and locked it. There was no more to be gained by waiting here. Indeed, there was everything to lose, for he had greatly exceeded his authority.

He tiptoed from the room and locked the door behind him, and he was removing the key when he heard a soft sound from below.

Someone was approaching. Someone who walked silently and who wore rubber-soled shoes. He edged back towards the door of Joseph's room, and then ill-luck overtook him. There was a loose floor-board here, and his foot struck it. In a second he was on his knees.

The man below wheeled like lightning. In a trice he had run down the few stairs and a door slammed as he sought the safety of the garden.

Bragg was outside in a moment. He caught sight of a flying figure disappearing into the spruce thicket, and gave instant chase. But the distance was too great. The man was swallowed up in the greenness long before the detective had reached the edge of the planting.

He came back, breathing heavily, and cursing his own clumsiness. Who else was so much interested in Ferguson that he would pay a surreptitious visit in the man's absence? He stood in the doorway and looked around, and in the soft soil of the court it was possible to see the diamond tread of a rubber-soled shoe.

It was obvious, then, that the man had come prepared on his mission. People did not wear tennis shoes in November. He was on the point of leaving when something caught his eyes.

It lay on the frozen grass and glinted in the setting rays of the afternoon sun. Bragg stood still and calculated that it lay in a direct line between the door of the garage and that part of the wood which the figure had entered. Then he went over and stared at what he saw.

He whistled his jubilation as he picked it up.

A watch. Not an ordinary watch, though . . . and then he stared at the rapidly-moving hand and heard the busy 'tick-tick'.

A stop-watch !

It was a silver watch, a large and expensive one, and he turned it over. There was engraving on the back of it and his eyes were elated—as he read the name inscribed :

MARK KELMAN

UTAH. 1929.

What interest did Kelman have in Ferguson ? That was the ques-
D.W.A.S.S. 65 C

tion which was burning in his mind as he crossed the crisp, shaven lawn towards Grey Lodge.

CHAPTER NINE

THE SUN WAS SETTING NOW IN A BLAZE OF GOLDEN GLORY, AND THE red glow of it tinted the windows and lent a rosy warmth to the grey stone of the building. Sergeant Bragg crossed on to the red gravel pathway without one base thought in his heart and made his way to the kitchens.

It was four o'clock, lights twinkled in the wall sconces, and in the big hall he saw the ruddy glow of a fire and caught the merry crackle of pine logs. Here was an atmosphere of comfort and luxury, and Bragg was all for a lot of comfort and luxury.

In the servants' hall he found a table set for six, and a pleasant-faced girl toasting bread before a huge fire.

"The other gentleman is having tea upstairs, sir—with Miss Campbell and Mr. Spicer. I've set a place for you here."

Bragg nodded his agreement.

"And a very good place too. What's your name, miss?"

"Sadie. Sadie Manders."

"I used to know a Manders. He was in K Division when I was on the desk. A fine feller too. I don't suppose he was any friend of yours?"

Sadie didn't suppose that he was either. She said so, and the sergeant nodded.

Joseph, he ascertained, was in his own room. Most afternoons he took a nap just before tea. Bragg went upstairs, straightening his tie as he went. The door of the butler's room was closed and he knocked and waited. There was no answer, and he turned the handle and went in.

The room was empty. A dying fire glowed through grey ash; on the table were the two glasses they had used and these had not been washed. Bragg closed the door and went back along the corridor. At the end of it was a wide window which faced over the lawn, and towards the woods. For a moment he stood there, and then a shadow moved far to his right. He stiffened, and for a split second he saw the figure of a man moving into the cover of the hedge. He had come from the wood, and was making his way towards the house, and in that one second Bragg had recognized the butler.

For a moment he stood stock still. Joseph had been in the wood. Joseph had known that he was paying a visit to the chauffeur's quarters. Had this gaunt man followed him? Of a sudden he turned and went downstairs and made his way to the rear of the house. A high hedge of beech and hawthorn skirted the vegetable garden, and to

the left of this ran the pathway which led to Grey Lodge itself. He reached this and started along.

The pathway was deserted, the garden was deserted, and only the cold mists of the evening met his gaze. Puzzled, he returned to the house, and made his way back to the butler's room. This time he went in without knocking, and disturbed Joseph in the act of putting fresh coal on the fire. The old man looked round with a start.

"Well, Mr. Bragg, I didn't hear you come in."

Bragg nodded. "I've been looking for you." He was looking down at Joseph's boots as he spoke, and around the welts there was the hint of dampness and the suggestion of leaf mould. "Been out some place?"

The old man chuckled.

"Out? Not me, Mr. Bragg."

"That's funny," Bragg said. "I could have sworn I'd seen you—over at the stables." He raised his eyes meaningly.

Joseph smiled without humour.

"You've made a mistake, Mr. Bragg. You must have seen someone else. Perhaps it was Mr. McIver. He was in the wood. I saw him go across in that direction some time ago." He laid down the tongs and gathered up the glasses.

Bragg rubbed reflectively at his chin. "You weren't here a few moments ago."

"I was in the cellars," Joseph said. "Mr. Spicer wanted some sherry brought up."

Sure enough, on the mahogany sideboard there were two dusty bottles. Joseph opened a cupboard and took out a crystal decanter and wiped it with a square of white silk. / From his pocket he drew a corkscrew and Bragg watched him manipulate this with some skill and decant the bottle.

Below them there was the musical tinkle of a handbell, and the old man looked up.

"That's tea, Mr. Bragg. I think you're expected below—that is, if you've no objections to a cup of tea."

Bragg had no objections, and said so graciously, and they went down to join a cheerful party in the servants' hall. Over tea he unbent, grew lyrical in his treatment of crime, and kept them enthralled with his stories of personal successes—mostly mythical ones. He had finished telling them of the amazing case of Lew Riley and of the shrewdness, perspicacity and general omniscience of Sergeant Bragg, when one of the girls said:

"I see by the paper as a new gentleman is in charge."

Bragg sniffed. It is impossible to describe the disgust, contempt and loathing implied in his gesture.

"Superintendent Dimm," the girl said. "There was a big bit in the paper about him,"

Bragg surveyed her coldly.

"There's been bits in the paper about me—but I didn't put them

in. Dimm's a clown, he's got softening of the brain. He's the most incompetent man at Scotland Yard. Don't take my word for it. Ask——" He stopped.

Bill McIver was standing in the doorway.

"I'd like to see you, Bragg."

The sergeant waved an airy hand. "Come inside, my boy."

"I'd like it to be outside," McIver said dryly, and turned away.

Bragg rose to his feet, raised his eyebrows meaningly. "There you go. Can't get along without me. It's always the same. McIver's a good lad—but he gets stuck at times." He went outside and found the tall inspector waiting for him.

"What's up?"

McIver shook an admiring head.

"You've been telling the tale again. You're as fond of yourself as Dimm is. That's the hardest thing I can say about any man."

Bragg scowled. "Don't mention Dimm to me. That man is anathema, as the Good Book says. An' he knows it."

"You were running him down," Bill McIver said. "I could put you on a charge for that."

Bragg laughed his derision. "If you put every man on a charge who runs Dimm down you'll have your hands full. I don't want to knock the man, but he's a heel, and there's nothing lower than a heel, and that's all there is about it."

"Moderate your language," Bill McIver said. "You're talking about a superior officer."

"Superior?" Bragg laughed hollowly. "What a thought! We had a store man when I was in the Army with more brains than Dimm had. He came from a place called Gartnavel and he went back there. He's still there—and he's still got more brains than Dimm ever had."

"Forget Dimm," said Bill McIver, and Bragg became brisk.

"All I want is a chance to do that. I've been looking for you anyway. I've got something for you. Something you'll be glad to hear about."

"What's that?"

"Ferguson isn't all he says he is."

"Who is?"

Bragg smirked. "I could mention one or two. Anyway, I've got the dirt on Ferguson. His name isn't Ferguson. It's Fender—James Henry Fender."

McIver's eyes narrowed.

"How did you find that out?"

Bragg raised his eyebrows. "How do I find anything out, my boy? I went through his rooms. He lives above the stables, and he's got quite a nice place." He told the inspector of the result of his investigation and Bill McIver was interested.

"He's been in the Army, you say? I'm glad of that. We'll be able to do quite a bit of checking up on him. Ferguson's a dark horse."

"I said that from the beginning," Bragg said.

For a second Bill McIver was silent; then: "I'd like to take a look at his place myself. I'm curious about Ferguson."

"You're not the only one," said Bragg, and Bill McIver cocked an eye.

Bragg winked. "Joseph. He followed me over there."

"Joseph?" The inspector was startled. "What makes you think that?"

Bragg told him and the young detective frowned.

"You didn't actually see him?"

"I as good as saw him," Bragg said. "No, he didn't admit it, but what crook would admit it? There's something fishy about Joseph. Take my word for that."

Bill chuckled grimly. "I wouldn't be prepared to say that. Joseph doesn't strike me as being the criminal type. Anyway, we can easily check up on him. He's been here for generations." He was silent for a moment. "If it was Joseph he was probably curious. Let me see that stop-watch."

Bragg produced it and examined it with professional interest.

"I've wrapped a handkerchief round it. There may be prints."

McIver took the watch in his hand and turned it over carefully.

"Mark Kelman—Utah—1929."

"There's not much doubt about who it belongs to," Bragg said, and Bill McIver chuckled.

"I would say not. It will be interesting to hear what Kelman has to say. What a pity you didn't see him. A smart detective would have done so."

Bragg sniffed.

"They don't come any smarter than me," he said. "Anyway, both Kelman and Joseph may have been there. I didn't see them, but that doesn't prove a thing."

McIver put the watch into his pocket.

"We'll go across to the stables before it gets dark. I'd like to see this for myself."

"I thought you were having tea with the gentry?" Bragg said, and the younger man flushed.

"You're an insubordinate devil, Bragg. Anyway, Miss Campbell isn't in the house at the moment and they're waiting tea for her. Mr. Spicer thinks she may have gone across to Cinnaford Chase to see his lordship."

Bragg raised an eye significantly.

"Young love. Ain't it a grand thing? She'll be Lady Cinnaford one of these days. There's romance for you."

"I prefer melodrama," said McIver. "Let's get across. I can spare half an hour."

"You've got no romance in your soul," said Bragg, and prepared to lead the way.

The grey light of evening was falling now. The long shadows lay across the weald and the gashes in the distant hills were purple patches in the gloaming. The woods and coverts of Cinnaford lay black in the

thickening of the day and close at hand they could hear the agitated call of a pheasant cock as he clambered to the security of a fir branch.

Bragg led the way, and in a moment more they had reached the purlieus of the stables and had lost themselves in the shadows.

"Pretty dark around here," McIver said.

Bragg's answering chuckle came to him from the darkness.

Speak for yourself, my boy. Personally, I've got eyes like a cat. Darkness never bothers me. I've trained myself to work in it." He groped in his pocket. "I've got a torch but I didn't want to use it until I was sure it wouldn't be seen from the house."

He produced it now, and in the ray of light Bill McIver saw a door ahead of him. In a moment they were ascending the stairs, and he could pick out the two rows of doors facing each other.

Bragg stopped and gestured.

"This is where I was this afternoon. The other fellow must have been over there. He was off like a shot. I was just in time to see him disappearing into the wood."

"What a pity you weren't faster."

Bragg smiled a scornful smile.

"There are few faster than me. I've set up records at the police sports. It was bad luck—that was all."

McIver chuckled dryly. "I think we can rule Joseph out there. He's sixty if he's a day, and a man who broke records at police sports ought to be fast enough to get a grip on him in a sprint. Is this the door?"

Bragg nodded.

"It is. It's locked. Half a minute till I get my keys. Hullo . . ."

There was surprise in his voice.

Bill McIver had turned the handle, and the door of the room opened inward. For a second they stood there, stood still, then Bragg drew in his breath.

"That's queer. I locked the door when I came out."

"You're sure of that?" McIver's voice was sharp.

"Am I a complete clown?" asked the indignant Bragg. "Am I wanting in the very elements of human understanding? Didn't I stand there an' lock the door as soon as I came out?"

"I believe you," the inspector said. "That means someone has been here."

The sergeant stared at him.

"Maybe Ferguson has come back?"

McIver shook his head. "No, he can't be back yet. But maybe your friend has been back. Kelman or Joseph, or whoever he was."

Bragg stepped into the room and swung his torch round. It was empty as it had been on his first arrival. He walked across and drew the shutters and then switched on the light.

Bill McIver stood in the doorway and the sergeant heard his soft whistle.

"What is it, Mr. McIver?"

"Don't move," the younger man said, and looking down Bragg saw at his feet the patterned outline of a rubber-soled shoe. For a moment he stared and then dropped to his knees. There were several prints and had been recently made. Now they were drying rapidly.

"That settles it," he said. "He's been back all right. Not very long ago either. That's a fair-sized foot, Mr. McIver. What do you take it for?"

"Ten or eleven," said Bill McIver. He took a tape from his pocket and measured it out methodically. "So he came back after all. That's interesting. I wonder what he was after."

"Search me," said the disconsolate Bragg. He stood in puzzled silence for a moment. "It must have been quite important because he ran a risk in coming back."

McIver went across to the dresser.

"This is the photograph you mentioned?" He took it down and studied it. "Dora Baker. I wonder who she would be."

Bragg had other interests. He produced the black-japanned box and ultimately the pass-book. This he handed across.

"Take a look at that, Inspector. That's enough to make one smell a rat."

McIver stared at the entries in silence for a long moment, then: "You've taken a note of this, I suppose?"

Bragg nodded. "I've got it all down. It may be evidence. What do you think of James Henry Fender?"

"He puzzles me," Bill McIver admitted. "We can check up on him a bit more. So far he's one of the few leads that we possess. But we'll have to be careful. Ferguson, to the best of our knowledge, has broken no law. He could get nasty."

"I can get nasty myself," Bragg said smugly, then frowned. "What puzzles me is why Kelman should be so interested in him—if it was Kelman."

"You and me—both," said Bill McIver, and prepared to leave. He spoke to the sergeant and Bragg went across to open out the shutters.

"I've got a mind to wipe away those footprints," he said. "Ferguson's the sort of chap who might turn ugly if he saw a——" He froze into silence.

"What is it?"

Bragg's voice was a thick whisper.

"Look! What's that?"

Bill McIver took two strides across the room. In a second more he was at the window, and then he stiffened.

Out there in the gathering darkness twinkled a subdued light. As they watched it moved across the line of their vision—came back again.

McIver whistled softly.

"He's looking for the stop-watch. He's come back."

CHAPTER TEN

IN A SECOND MORE BRAGG WAS ON THE STAIRWAY, AND EVEN BILL McIVER's long legs found it difficult to keep pace with him. At the bottom the sergeant stopped and looked back. McIVER heard his hoarse whisper:

"Be careful with the door. We don't want to frighten him."

Bill nodded in the darkness.

"Leave that to me. I'll close it."

They stepped outside and the door was closed silently behind them. From where they stood they could see the beam of light crossing and recrossing the grass. Beyond it, in the gathering darkness, there was the blurred figure of a man. They saw his silhouette vaguely against the blue-blackness of the sky. At the moment he seemed to be going away from them.

Bragg took a step forward and felt McIVER's restraining hand on his arm. "Take it away. Work round to the right and I'll move to the left. Try to get between him and the wood—then close in on him."

"Trust me," said Bragg, and melted into the shadows.

McIVER watched him go, and then edged his way across to the grass. It was cold and crisp, for there was frost in the night air. He dropped to his knees, crawled forward and lessened the distance between himself and the light. He was twenty yards away when he heard the sound of a twig snap.

In a second the light was switched off, and then to his ears came the sound of running footsteps. McIVER came to his feet, the torch in his own hand cutting a swathe of light through the darkness. Ahead of him he saw the running figure closing in on the wood, and, in the distance, the dim outline of Bragg.

"Hold him, Bragg!" he shouted.

There was the sound of a scuffle and then a curse. In a moment more he had reached the sergeant, and Bragg was breathing threats.

"I didn't get a grip of him in the darkness," he complained bitterly. "He handed me off—like a rugger player." He was running as he spoke, but it was McIVER who first broke the strip of bracken that encroached from the wood. Here it was black as ink.

Ahead of them they could hear the sound of running footsteps. Here was a man who was no stranger to his surroundings, for he ran without falter. McIVER used his light to pick out the pathway. It ran down through the wood for twenty yards and then opened into a wide shooting ride. Here the bracken had been cut, and they ran without hindrance for a matter of moments. Ahead of them the sounds had died away, and now there was only the silence of the wood.

Bill McIVER drew up, and in a moment Bragg was level with him. The little sergeant was breathing hard.

"That was rotten luck, my boy. A moment more and we'd have

had him. If I'd only got my hands on him . . ." he shrugged in philosophical resignation. "What started him up?"

"You did," snarled Bill. "You stepped on a twig."

"Me?" Bragg was outraged. "Are you trying to make out that it was my fault? It's a well-known fact that I'm like a cat in the darkness. Ask anyone. Even old Dimm knows that."

Bill chuckled grimly.

"He's well away. I reckon we'd better make our way back to Grey Lodge. We can't do anything here and it's getting mighty cold."

They made their way back, and Sergeant Bragg was disconsolate.

"That feller could run like a deer. He knew his way about all right. I'd give a month's salary to have my hands on him just now."

McIver grunted. There was a sense of real disappointment in his heart, but he was too good a policeman to feel sorry for himself. If this had been Kelman, another chance would come along, and that in the near future. For a moment or so they trudged along in darkness, and then Bragg said:

"We'd better not mention this to old Dimm."

"Chief Inspector Dimm," said Bill McIver dryly, but Bragg shook his head.

"Call him what you like. It don't make any difference. He's still what he is. Anyway, he'd make a song about it all."

The silhouette of Grey Lodge loomed up out of the darkness and there was the cheerful twinkle of electric light. The curtains had not been drawn in the upstairs rooms, and they could see the outline of Eldon Spicer as he walked across the floor.

Bill McIver looked at his watch.

"It's after five. I've kept them waiting."

"What a thought!" said Sergeant Bragg.

The inspector lengthened his steps and in a moment or more they were within the shadow of the house. Here McIver stopped.

"I'm going up to see Spicer. You'd better go around and see if Joseph is in the house. If he is—he isn't your man."

"Trust me," said Bragg.

Bill McIver went upstairs and in the comfortable library Eldon Spicer was turning over the pages of a book without much evidence of interest at all. He laid it down when the policeman came in and sighed his relief.

"That was Shakespeare," he said. "*Hamlet*. They tell me it's a great story but I can't see it that way, Inspector. I've seen the play too, not that I cared very much for it. Mrs. Spicer was very fond of that sort of thing. She was cultured, if you like to put it that way—like Marion."

"Where is Miss Campbell?" McIver asked.

Spicer shrugged.

"She'll be along in a moment. She's been back for half an hour now. She was over at the Chase—but of course you know that."

A smile twinkled in Bill McIver's eye.

"Yes—I know that, Mr. Spicer. You've already told me."

"Cinnaford is a fine, upstanding young feller," said Spicer complacently. "I wish I'd known him when he was in the States—but there you are. We never came across each other. Anyway, he's all man. He'll make her a fine husband. Lady Cinnaford . . .!" He closed his eyes pleasantly. "Say, you don't know how much satisfaction this gives me, Mr. McIver. I've seen that little girl grow up an' I love her as much as if she were my own daughter. So did my wife. She'd be proud to think that she was marrying a lord. Women are funny that way."

McIver was a little amused.

"Cinnaford's a good sort."

"One of the best. It nearly broke my heart when they turned him down for the Army. He's got a weak heart—strained it boxing. He's got my sympathy. I've got a bad ticker myself. Not too bad, mind you, but I've got to be careful. Here comes Joseph now."

The butler came in, bearing a silver tray and the appurtenances of tea, and in a moment more came Marion Campbell.

She was very beautiful. Bill McIver noted, not for the first time, the healthy delicacy of her cheeks and the humorous, upturned twist of her lips. She came across and held out a cool hand.

"I'm sorry I've kept you waiting so long, Inspector. Daddy tells me that you're ravenous——"

"I said he was starving," said Spicer composedly. "Anyway, I am, my dear. This is one English custom I've never managed to get used to a bit, but today I'm ready for it." He lifted a silver sandwich tray and held it out to the policeman. "Have one of these, McIver. They're too dainty for my liking, but I suppose they've got to be like that. One of the rules."

Bill McIver chuckled.

"I'm quite prepared to take them as they come, sir."

Marion Campbell was pouring out the tea. Now she looked round.

"One lump or two?"

Bill held up one finger and she smiled.

"I thought all men had a sweet tooth. Daddy has. He takes three lumps in his coffee. Personally, I think that's ridiculous." She came round and sat down beside him on the long sofa. "What about your murderer now?"

Bill shook his head.

"We're still in the dark," he confessed.

Marion Campbell looked at him. "I thought that Scotland Yard was omniscient," she said slowly, and she saw a lazy twinkle come into his eyes.

"Not omniscient, Miss Campbell. But we're very patient. We work very hard and we never give up. We usually get a man once we go after him. Mind you, I'm not trying to make out that we are the best police force in the world. But I think we get the best results, and in this calculating world results are something to go by."

"I suppose so," she said. She sipped her tea thoughtfully. "It must be interesting work, though."

"It has its moments," said Bill McIver, and Eldon Spicer nodded. "Romantic, eh? That's what it is. Romantic and adventurous." Bill chuckled grimly.

"There's not much romance connected with police work, Mr. Spicer, and the adventure you get is usually adventure of a pretty sordid type. No—police work isn't just like that. It's hard, grinding work. It calls for patience and endurance and a lot of old-fashioned hard work."

"Selwyn doesn't think so," Marion Campbell said. "He used to be a police reporter. Selwyn's seen a lot of things in his day. But he still thinks it's romantic. He often wishes he could join the Yard."

Bill McIver laughed.

"If I were in Lord Cinnaford's shoes," he said, "I'd think myself mighty lucky, and I wouldn't want to change anything of it." He was looking at her as he spoke and he saw her flush.

Spicer rose to his feet and found a silver cigar-box.

"Have one of these, Inspector. I got 'em sent from the States specially. You can't get a good cigar in England. They just don't make 'em."

Bill shook his head. "I prefer a pipe," he said.

Spicer struck a match. "What about your Grey Face?" he said.

Bill waited until his pipe was drawing, and then:

"I can't tell you much there, Mr. Spicer. Grey Face is our Number One criminal, but of course you know that. He goes for banks mostly."

Mr. Spicer smiled without mirth.

"Yes, I know that. There's one guy I'm interested in. He must be a pretty smart feller. I've had a few chats with Cinnaford about him. Mark Kelman's got a theory about him."

"Has he?" McIver's voice was flat.

Spicer nodded. "Yeah. Mark thinks that——"

The girl looked up and there was a reproach in her eye.

"Daddy, you're not going to talk about Mark's theories? You always laugh at them. I don't think it fair of you."

Mr. Spicer blew a cloud of smoke and peered through it. "Not me, I'm too long in the tooth to laugh at Mark Kelman. There's one wise feller. Old Mark has a reputation. But he amuses me." For a second Bill McIver imagined that Eldon Spicer was going to tell him just how much Mark Kelman did amuse him, but the older man was suddenly silent.

McIver leaned across for another sandwich.

"Have you known Kelman for long?"

"Since we came here," Spicer said. "Even before that, I'd heard of him at least." He seemed suddenly eager to drop the subject of Mark Kelman, for he looked across to where the girl was sitting.

"What was Selwyn talking about?"

She laughed.

"Selwyn's a dear. He was talking about a variety of things. About the murder, of course. He's terribly interested in that. He was

talking about going up to London to make some enquiries of his own. Selwyn knows a lot of people and I'm sure he thinks that he can find out something. Anyway, I think he's worried about Mark. I'm sure that he is."

Spicer took his cigar out of his mouth. "Worried about Mark? Why should he be, Marion? Don't be ridiculous."

She was a little serious.

"No—I really do mean that. Of course he doesn't think that Mark knew the girl any more than he said he did. But Selwyn's been at a loose end for so long that now that this has happened he has just leapt at it."

The clock was chiming six and Bill McIver rose to his feet.

"I'd no idea that it was so late. Bragg will be waiting for me. You don't mind if I go downstairs?" He looked across at Spicer.

The millionaire shook his head.

"Certainly not. I can give you a car if you want to drive to the village."

Bill chuckled. "I think we can manage without that luxury, sir. It isn't too far and Bragg needs exercise. Thank you, all the same."

Spicer came out to the corridor with him and stood leaning on the banisters. "I hope Selwyn isn't going to mix himself up in this," he said. "That boy is a go-getter, but I don't like the idea of him going after Grey Face. If he does he might get more than he's bargained for."

Bill McIver laughed.

"I wouldn't worry too much, Mr. Spicer. After all, the professionals haven't been able to do much about Grey Face, and I hardly think that even a gifted amateur is going to accomplish a great deal more." He nodded and went downstairs a little thoughtfully.

Bragg he found in Joseph's room. There was a bottle on the table and two empty glasses stood beside it. It was easy to surmise that Bragg had been spending a profitable half-hour. He looked up as the inspector came to the door and waved a hand. "Come in, my boy."

McIver looked down at him stonily. "You've been drinking."

"Me?" Bragg laughed scornfully. "You know me, Mr. McIver. One drink and no more. Anyway, I can stand a lot more than I've had here." He rose to his feet. "I've been making some enquiries about one or two people."

"Who, for instance?"

"Kelman," said Bragg, "and Ferguson—and Lord Cinnaford. Joseph has it all at his fingertips."

The butler smiled without humour and looked at McIver.

"I pick up a lot of gossip, Inspector. You can't help it in a place like this. But I don't normally repeat what I hear."

"That's a wise principle," said McIver softly. "I advise you to stick to it, Joseph. Queer things sometimes happen to people who gossip unduly. Even in places like this. You've known all the Cinnafords? All the recent ones, I mean?"

The old man nodded.

"Yes, I've known them all."

"Interesting," said Bill McIver. He nodded and turned away, and he was in the corridor when Bragg caught up with him. The little sergeant was peeved.

"What did you mean by that last remark?"

McIver chuckled grimly.

"I wouldn't put too much faith in Joseph if I were you."

Bragg paused, one hand on the handle of the door. "Do you think he's a crook?" he demanded, and McIver laughed.

"Joseph? Who knows? No, I don't think that. But you know what these old family retainers are like. Joseph will be devoted to Cinnaford's interests and Cinnaford is the best friend that Mark Kelman has, or rumour lies. And anything that you let drop to Joseph will find its way to Kelman. I'd be careful about that. You didn't mention the stop-watch?"

Bragg sniffed.

"What do you take me for? No—I didn't mention it."

They went out into the darkness. There was no moon in the sky as yet, although it would soon be up. Frost hung in the night air, and the gravel of the walk crunched crisply underfoot. In a few moments they had reached the main road, and had turned towards the village. For a long moment they walked in silence, and then Bill McIver said:

"I'm having Kelman checked."

Bragg cleared his throat. "That's a wise move. You think he's mixed up in this? I think so myself. He's too smooth—and he's an American."

McIver was amused. "What does that add up to?"

"Plenty," said Bill significantly. "If that girl was really his wife, I think we'll put a rope round his neck."

"Grey Face killed Margaret Elter," Bill McIver said softly. "No—I don't know about Kelman. All that one can say is that it is suspicious. But Kelman can be checked. Plenty of people must know him."

They were halfway to the village now, and in the distance they could see the winking of an uncovered light. Bragg drew a long sigh.

"There's something about an inn that gets you. It isn't the place itself—it isn't the beer. It's just atmosphere and——" He felt Bill McIver's big hand tighten over his arm, and stiffened.

"What's wrong?"

McIver kept on walking, but he turned his head.

"Listen."

Bragg listened. In the distance he could hear the sound of muffled footsteps as though someone were walking warily in their rear. In a moment the policeman in him came to the fore.

"Who can that be?"

Bill McIver shook his head. "I don't know. I've heard them for several minutes now. Whoever he is, he's walking carefully."

"You mean he's following us?"

The Inspector chuckled.

"He's certainly following us—whether wilfully or not. Of course it may be some farm labourer returning home. I'd like to find out. Keep on walking. I'm going back." He had stepped on to the grass verge as he spoke and Bragg saw the darkness swallow him up. He hesitated for a moment, then continued his steady pace, his senses keenly alert, his ears attuned for the slightest of sounds. Behind him he could hear that cautious footstep, and then in a moment more it died away.

As it did so, he wheeled round and stepped on to the grass and doubled backwards. He had not gone twenty yards when he heard McIver's voice.

"Stop!"

In an instant there was the sound of running feet and then that of McIver's in pursuit. Bragg redoubled his own efforts but he was not more than a hundred yards along the road when he heard McIver approaching from the darkness. The big detective had switched on his pocket torch.

"That you, Bragg?"

"Yes." Bragg was blowing with his undue exertion. "Who was it? Did you spot him at all?"

McIver chuckled coldly. "I didn't. He was wise to me. He must have noticed me leave the road. He followed on a little, out of curiosity, I think. That fellow could run. He left the road, by the way. I reckon he knows his way across these fields all right. We're at a disadvantage here." He walked on in silence for a moment or so, and when the silence was ultimately broken it was Bragg who broke it.

"Was it the same feller we went after tonight already?"

"That," said Bill McIver, "is the question. A stop-watch is a queer sort of a thing to carry about with you. Not many people own one. An athlete might, I suppose. I wonder just how athletic our friend Kelman is."

Their footsteps were ringing out clearly on the frosted silver roadway, and in a moment more the lights of the inn showed up before them. Bragg breathed his relief.

"This place puts years on me," he complained. "Give me the city every time. I'm a gregarious sort of feller. That's a good word. I picked it up at a lecture I was at last summer. It means I like company."

Bill McIver chuckled. "And I think you're correct. Company's a fine thing. I'm beginning to feel that way about things myself. I wonder what Ferguson's opinion is."

"Ferguson?" Bragg was startled. "What brought him into your mind?"

"I was thinking," said McIver softly, "about Dora Baker. Ferguson doesn't look the romantic type, but you never know. He's surly—but what made him surly? That's the question. I'd like to find an answer to that."

Bragg stopped walking to stare up at him.

"And do you think you'll manage it?" he asked sarcastically.

Bill McIver pondered the question.

"I don't know. I'm not sure. Kelman knows—I'm pretty certain of that. I reckon Kelman is a pretty smart fellow. I'd like to know just one-half as much as he does. I've got a theory of my own—but I'm not too sure about it. I may be very wide of the mark. Ferguson could tell us a lot. I wish he weren't the type that he is."

They had reached the steps of the inn now, and on them Bragg paused for a moment to look up into the face of the younger man.

"What type is he? What do you mean?"

"I mean that he may be mad," Bill McIver said cryptically. "There's just the possibility, although I don't think for a moment that he is. But he's a brooder, you can see that in his face—in his eyes. He hates policemen."

"That doesn't mean he's mad," said the practical Bragg. "I'm beginning to hate them myself—an' I'm not mad." He opened the door. "You're being mysterious, McIver, an' I hate a mystery more than anything in the world."

Bill McIver shook his head.

"Ferguson isn't a mystery. I'm only guessing, but unless I miss my guess he's something very much worse—a tragedy."

Bragg sniffed coldly.

"Come inside," he said coarsely. "It must be the night air."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CHIEF INSPECTOR DIMM WAS IN HIS ELEMENT. WHEN THEY WENT INSIDE they found that he had spent the afternoon in countermanding all the orders and instructions that McIver had already given. He had taken possession of a small room on the second floor, and opposite Bragg's bedroom, and had induced Voyce to instal a desk and light a fire. Here he sat and smoked innumerable cigars, interviewed witnesses and issued commands. With him was a county superintendent of police, and this large man looked unhappy, for Dimm had spent a profitable hour enlarging on the subtle difference that existed in the county police method of approach to crime and the Scotland Yard method.

He was business-like when McIver came in.

"I've been going over this report from Carmody. He sent photographs and I must say he's made a good job of them."

Praise from Dimm was praise indeed.

McIver nodded. "Carmody knows his business. It's up to us now to find the gun."

"Find the man who used it and you'll find the gun," said Dimm oracularly. He looked at the man who sat beside him.

"This is Superintendent Page of the Berkshire Constabulary."

"I have already met Superintendent Page," said McIver. He sat down uninvited, kept on his hat, tilted his chair and put his feet up on Dimm's desk.

The chief inspector frowned. As an ex-sergeant-major he was all for respect, and this young detective never gave it. He returned to a subject he had been discussing when he was interrupted.

"This Batten mystery was a curious affair. There were only three clues and you had to look hard before you even discovered them. There was a torn pack of cards, a tube of toothpaste and a used railway ticket. Out of these three clues I painted a picture which brought Batten to the gallows. The Chief Commissioner himself congratulated me. He said it was a remarkable achievement."

The superintendent muttered a polite platitude, and Dimm smirked. "Not at all. It's brains that does it. Brains plus hard graft. I learned that when I was in the Army. You've got to know what to do first of all, and then you've got to know how to do it. That's one of the things that's wrong with the Yard at the present day. There's a lack of brains among the higher officials." He shook his head. "Of course I don't want to mention any names. No names—no pack drill. . . ." He winked expressively. "But you know how it is."

The superintendent rose to his feet. He had been itching to go for an hour and now he seized the opportunity.

"When we are ready to make an arrest we'll let you know," said Dimm. "It won't be long now. I've got an idea that you'll see action in a very short time."

When the man had gone he shook his head.

"These county policemen are all alike. No imagination—no ideas. Give them a poaching case or a house burglary and they'll make a job of it, but when it comes to anything else . . ." He shrugged in deprecation.

McIver brought the conversation to a more practical level.

"We've found out a little more about this fellow Ferguson. Bragg took a chance and searched his room."

"Without a warrant?" Dimm raised his eyebrows.

"Without a warrant."

"He greatly exceeded his legal rights. I could put him on a charge for that."

McIver chuckled. "I very much question if you could. Anyway, he had some interesting information to report." He told the chief inspector what Bragg had learned and Dimm was intrigued. When he mentioned the Army discharge sheet, his big hand slapped the desk.

"What was the number?"

McIver produced his notebook. "Army number 2626602, and the name was James Henry Fender."

"That's a Guards number." Dimm was speculative. "I'll have Sergeant Coe make enquiries there." He made a note and then rose to his feet. There was a small leather folio in one corner of the room, and he went across to this, opened it and took out something which he proceeded to unfold over the desk.

It was a map of England and it was marked with a series of asterisks in red ink. Green lines traversed its white surface and here and there were little circles.

"My own idea," said Dimm. "Being a scientific man, I had this map made to my specifications."

McIver was wilfully dense.

"What is it a map of?"

"This map"—Dimm tapped it—"represents the sum of my deductions and the sum of police knowledge concerning the Grey Face robberies. Every robbery but one is marked on the map. You will notice that every bank robbery has occurred in the Eastern Counties and in London, except the Edinburgh one."

"I noticed that without a map."

Dimm peered at him crossly. "That's beside the point. You've got to chart your work as you go about it." He began to fold it up again. "Do you know how often Grey Face has committed a crime?"

"On six occasions."

"Six," said Dimm. He ticked them off on his fingers. "Now my idea is this: this man scours the country looking for suitable banks to hold up. It isn't every place that is suitable. He has to have a building in a fairly busy centre so that he can mingle with the crowd. He has to have a bank which will carry enough cash on hand to make it worth his while. All that calls for organization and planning. My theory is that Grey Face is a gang."

McIver was dazed.

"You mean that he employs a gang?"

Dimm nodded. "It's a theory I've had for a long time now. There may be half a dozen men. There may only be two or three. Each of them is Grey Face when the time comes to pull a job."

McIver rubbed a reflective jaw. "It hadn't occurred to me like that . . . I must admit that there could be something in it." And then he stared. "Is that what brought you down here?"

The chief inspector nodded.

"Coe is carrying on the London end of it. He won't learn anything there. I know—I've been over the ground. As soon as I read your report and heard the bullet that killed Miss Elter had come from Grey Face's gun, I knew that I'd got the opening I wanted. I've studied your report on Kelman—and I've got an idea that he knows a lot more about this than he admits. There's a man who travels the whole of England. Why? What's behind it?"

"What about Ferguson?" asked the interested inspector.

"Another of the gang. Ferguson is a chauffeur." Dimm made a play with his hands. "He'll know the roads and he'll be a handy man. Those two can do with watching. Mark my words, McIver—we'll find something there!"

McIver got to his feet, for the dinner-gong was ringing and he could hear the sound of voices in the hall.

"You may be right," he said cautiously, "but I'll give you a word of advice. Go easy with Kelman in the meantime, because he's an

influential man. If you cause him any trouble he'll kick up a fuss, and unless I'm mistaken he knows the right people."

Downstairs he found his sergeant standing with his back to the fire. "I've been looking for you, McIver. Voyce told me you were with Dimm. I hope you didn't tell him too much."

"I told him about Ferguson."

"All about him?"

"Not about the bank account."

"Thank goodness!" said the conscienceless sergeant. "He'd have arrested him out of hand. That's one of the things I like about Dimm. He can't believe that any person could have money unless he stole it."

"Dimm has his own ideas," said McIver. He told of the chief inspector's theory about Kelman, and Bragg considered it.

"It might fit—but it's too easy. Grey Face may be a bad criminal but he's a clever one. If Kelman was Grey Face he'd have a score of alibis to cover up his actions. Did you tell him about the watch?"

McIver shook his head.

"Subordinate officers are entitled to their own little secrets," he said. "Besides, that would only have made him the more certain. I don't want Kelman frightened so soon as this."

He heard Bragg sniff.

"Unless we can do something to stop him, Dimm will blow the gaff as soon as he sees Kelman." He took the watch from his pocket and looked at it again. "A nice little plaything, must have cost quite a bit. Who is Utah?"

"Possibly the girl friend," said the dry McIver. "Come and dine. Dimm is eating by himself because he doesn't believe it to be in keeping with his dignity to hobnob with the lower orders. Here is Voyce with the soup."

They were finishing the meal when they heard the sound of voices in the hall and the little landlord came in.

"Lord Cinnaford is outside," he said. "His lordship would like to see you if you can spare him a moment."

Cinnaford came through a moment later.

"Jolly decent of you to spare me a minute or two," he said. He sat down, stretched out his legs and lit a cigarette. "No, I haven't really anything to tell you. I just came down out of interest. I've been doing a lot of thinking about this murder and I'm wondering if I could be of any assistance to you."

"What do you mean?"

Cinnaford looked at the inspector. "I'll tell you frankly what I mean. I'm a reporter first and lord of the manor a long way after that. I was a crime reporter when I was in the States, and once you've dabbled in that sort of thing the urge never leaves you. I've worked on murder cases with the police before now—and I'd like to help. This case has a personal issue anyway, because I met Miss Elter before she was shot—and I'm a very good friend of Mark Kelman."

"What do you mean by that?"

Cinnaford looked uncomfortable. "I just mean that old Mark and I are as pally as anyone could be. Damn it all, inspector, I'm not a fool. I can see as far as anyone, and any evidence that you've dug up in the meantime all tends to implicate Mark. Don't tell me it doesn't—because I know differently. And more than that—so does Mark!"

There was a little silence.

McIver rose to his feet and tried the coffee-pot. There was a little in it and he drained it. Then he turned. "You're putting me in a rather difficult position, Lord Cinnaford. You admit openly that Kelman is your best friend—and you agree that he seems implicated. Bearing that in mind, it could quite easily be true that Kelman asked you to come down here to find out just how much we did suspect him—or just how much we did know. Or—to go a little further—it might well be that you volunteered to find out from us just to what extent he was implicated."

The colour rose to the young man's cheeks.

McIver did not seem to notice it. "You see what I mean, I'm sure. Mr. Kelman is in a rather embarrassing position and he does not appear to wish to help us at the present. His statements have all been most guarded. This young lady . . ." He stopped rather abruptly.

Cinnaford leaned forward. "Go on."

The inspector shook his head. "I'm not really sure of what I do want to say. You heard what Miss Campbell and Mr. Spicer had to say about that compact. So far as the police are concerned it does not exist officially, but I have no doubt that Mr. Spicer was telling the truth when he spoke about it. His impression was that Margaret Elter was Kelman's wife. Naturally he didn't say so, but he very definitely inferred it. It is reasonable to assume, of course, that there may have been more than one 'Mark' among Miss Elter's circle of acquaintances, but for all that, one forms impressions."

"Then you don't think that Kelman has been frank with you?"

McIver laughed.

"He will be franker yet. So far he has only had to give a very brief account of his dealings with Miss Elter."

"How did he explain her?" The young nobleman was frankly curious. He saw the Scot frown. "I'm sorry if I've asked something that I shouldn't, but I'm wondering about her myself."

"His explanation was satisfactory if it was true." McIver would say no more.

Cinnaford nodded. He had let his cigarette go out. Now he tossed it into the fire. "I'll tell you this frankly for what it is worth. Margaret Elter may have been married to Mark, but if that is true he never inferred at any time that he was a married man. Candidly, I don't believe it. Women scarcely interested him. The only woman I ever saw him interested in was Miss Campbell—and that in the most paternal fashion. I think you will probably be aware of the fact that Miss Campbell will be Lady Cinnaford very soon. Kelman was delighted when I told him, and when we are married he will be best man."

He rose to go. "But I really mean what I've said, McIver. I'm not such a dud as I look. I've got a bad ticker—Dr. Erskine tells me I strained it boxing—but otherwise I'm as sound as a bell. And if you want any testimonials to my abilities as a reporter, get in touch with Coleman of the *Detroit Tribune*. He'll probably tell you things about me which will make your hair stand on end, but at any rate he'll put you wise to my only talent." He chuckled a little. "Don't think I'm bragging. I'm very much in earnest."

He nodded and took his leave.

Bragg watched him go. "A very nice young man," he said mincingly. "As a democratic man I don't hold much with lords and what-nots—but if you have to have them, I'll take that kind. No airs—no graces."

"If you want to take anything," said his superior with heavy irony, "take this report of yours to Chief Inspector Dimm. I have already vetted it for spelling mistakes and they are legion. The grammar is atrocious but I'm not touching that. If Dimm will come out into the open like this he must suffer!"

Bragg picked up the scribbled sheet.

"Where are you going?"

"I have an appointment," said McIver archly. He rose and went out.

CHAPTER TWELVE

QUARTER OF AN HOUR TOOK MCIVER TO THE STATION, AND HERE HE FOUND the uniformed porter yawning over his fire.

Bayliss recognized him at once. "You're the gentleman from Scotland Yard, sir—I've seen you in the village."

McIver nodded.

The little man poked at the fire and was prepared to talk. "I've been answering questions for the last two or three days, sir. The county police have been making enquiries about the murder."

McIver was not here to ask questions about the murder. "I've read these reports," he said, "and it's something entirely different that I'm after. When does the last train arrive?"

"Ten twenty-seven."

It was close on nine just now. He set his watch by the station clock and asked another question.

"Did Ferguson go up to town by train this morning?"

Bayliss nodded.

"Yes, sir. By the 9.36."

"And he hasn't come back yet?"

"Not yet. But he'll be on the 10.27. He took a day return, as he always does."

"So he often travels up to town?"

"I wouldn't say often." Bayliss was clearly puzzled. "Perhaps every six or seven weeks. I've always thought that he had a friend in the City. He never actually said so, but sometimes he'd take up a parcel of something. Once or twice he got honey from me to take with him——"

"Honey?" McIver was astonished. From what he had heard Ferguson was not the sort of man who would spend his time buying parcels of honey.

"Yes, sir. I have one or two skeps in the station yard. I haven't much of a garden of my own, but the head office lets me keep my skeps at the bottom of the station. In summertime there are always plenty of flowers in the ornamental beds. Usually Voyce takes most of my honey for the table at the 'Grey Man', but I sell an odd section to friends. Ferguson always asked me in advance. Sometimes he would take vegetables too—he got them from Edgar Nepson along at the Stiles."

There was no mystery here then. Very evidently Ferguson's expedition to the City was concerned with his own social affairs. He thanked the man and went out.

He had an hour to spare, and he went down to the police-station where Haycock was writing up his daily report. The young man was flattered to see him.

"Come right in, sir. If I can do anything to help you—just you tell me what it is."

McIver shook his head. "I don't know that you can in the meantime. Actually I didn't come down to look for information. I'm checking over information received. What do you know about this man Ferguson?"

"Ferguson?" The constable was surprised. "Not a great deal, sir. A quiet enough man but very hot-tempered. I had to charge him once along at the 'Grey Man', but nothing came of it." He pursed his lips. "You don't think that he had anything to do with the murder?"

McIver laughed.

"Hardly. But I'll give you a bit of advice, constable, from my great store of worldly knowledge. When you're on a murder case, check and recheck the alibi and the character of every person who came in contact with the murdered party on the day of his death. Time enough to look further afield when you have eliminated the people who have had an opportunity."

Haycock nodded. "There's something in that." He hesitated. "I had a summons from Mr. Dimm this afternoon. He seems a very capable gentleman and he certainly knows a lot about police work."

"Did he tell you he did?"

The young man nodded eagerly. "I shouldn't mind working under a man like that. You'd feel that you stood a chance of getting somewhere." He sighed a little. "That's one of the snags of county work. The only thing you ever come up against is an odd poaching

case or a black-out offence. A man doesn't get much experience dealing with the like of that. The chief inspector was telling me that he had solved two murders before he was thirty."

McIver was not dazed, he was staggered.

"Chief Inspector Dimm?"

"Yes, sir."

Dimm had a partisan here. McIver changed the subject. "Have you ever had a burglary here in recent years? At any of the big houses, I mean?"

"Not since I've been here." The younger man was positive. "There was a small burglary at Grey Lodge about seven years ago, but the man was caught. That was in the time of the late Mr. Lennon, who used to live there. Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity," said the laconic Scot. He chatted for a while longer and took his leave. It was a cold, clear night and there was a touch of frost in the air when he made his way back to the station. A pale rind of moon rode high in the sky, and the scream of an approaching train came to his ears as he walked up the asphalt path that led to the waiting-room.

A moment later the train came in, and to his satisfaction only two passengers alighted, and of these one was a woman. Ferguson stopped to speak to Bayliss and the tall inspector waited for him to approach.

The man had a final word and came down towards him—saw him and then hesitated. It was obvious that he recognized in him the figure of authority, for he made no attempt to brush past.

McIver said: "Good evening, Ferguson. I don't think you've met me before. I am Inspector McIver."

The man made no reply.

McIver said: "I think we are both going in the same direction." And there was something in his voice which caused Ferguson to fall in at his side. They had reached the road when the older man said hoarsely:

"What's the game, Inspector?"

McIver sparked a match and lit his pipe.

"I came down to meet you," he said.

Ferguson digested this and then said: "Well . . . what do you want? I've done nothing. I never saw that girl in my life before. . . . And I never saw her again after I drove her down to the station." His voice was agitated.

McIver said: "You've been in prison, Ferguson?"

"What of it?"

There was no denial in the older man's voice. He stopped suddenly. "Look here, mister. I know my rights. I have been in prison. Why—I won't tell you! If you can find out, good and well. I went to prison for something I'd do again tomorrow." There was a wealth of passion in his voice.

The policeman's voice hardened. "What you have done in the past is no great concern of mine, Ferguson. But what you are doing just now interests me very much. I'm investigating a murder case which

has a lot of funny angles. You are one of the funniest. What did they fling you out of the Grens for?"

"They didn't fling me out!" the man said fiercely. Then he saw his mistake. "Damn you! What are you trying to get at?"

McIver caught him by the arm. "Don't make a move like that again towards me. I'm a younger man than you are, and I'd hate to have to take advantage of it." And then his voice dropped. "There's not much sense in quarrelling with me. We've got a murder on our hands and a lot of unpleasant enquiries to make. If you don't give me the answers you'll have to give them to a man who will have much less sympathy for you than I have."

Ferguson straightened himself and walked on. Then:

"What do you want to know?"

"Your name is James Henry Fender?"

There was a hissing little sound. Ferguson said: "Yes."

"You were a regular soldier?"

"Yes."

"What did you serve a term of imprisonment for?"

"If you know as much as that, you can find out!"

McIver sighed. "We'll find out all right. Why are you living in Cinnaford under the alias of Henry Ferguson?"

"I've got to live, haven't I?" Ferguson looked round at him. "If I'd gone to Lord Cinnaford and told him my record, do you think he'd have given me a job?"

"Was it Lord Cinnaford who employed you?"

"Not the present Lord Cinnaford."

"You were at Grey Lodge before the present Lord Cinnaford came home from America?"

"Yes." Ferguson's voice was only a growl. "I've been here since 1938—and it's a good job. I don't want to lose it."

"There is no reason why you should," said McIver pleasantly. "Why did the late Lord Cinnaford employ you?"

The man seemed surprised.

"Why shouldn't he? I'm a bit of a mechanic. I've always been handy with tools, and Lord Cinnaford—the last Lord Cinnaford—used to drive at Brooklands, and that's where I was working when I met him. He offered me the job and I jumped at it."

There was not much to be gained here. McIver tried a new line of questioning.

"Had you ever met Mr. Kelman of Friar's Hall before you came to Cinnaford?"

"No."

There was a downright positiveness about this which made the detective wonder if the man was lying.

"Have you ever been in America?"

"No," said Ferguson again. This time there was an edge to his voice and it was evident that he was becoming uncomfortable under the questioning.

They walked on for a little further, and of a sudden the chauffeur

turned round in his tracks and peered into the dark stretch of road that lay behind him.

"Did you hear something then?"

McIver poised in an attitude of listening. For a moment he was silent, but there was no sound in the cool night air. He shook his head. "I hear nothing."

They resumed their way. The white paring of moon was high in the sky now, and the stars were twinkling brilliantly in the frosty air.

They had reached the woods that flanked Grey Lodge and the road lay dark in the shadow of the spruce. They entered the shadow and the crisp *klop, klop* of their footsteps on the frosty road rang out clearly. For a moment or so they walked in silence and then McIver asked a final question.

"Who is Dora Baker?"

For a split second he thought that the man was going to strike him. Ferguson swung round with a savage oath.

"Damn you, you sneaking . . . snivelling . . ." He stopped abruptly, and his whole manner changed.

"You'll get no more out of me, McIver. You can do what the hell you like. I've done nothing that is against the law. . . . Nothing. If you want to pull me in, you can do it, and if you do I'll see you through every court in the country. I'm not the normal cheap-jack you run up against. Bear that in mind. I can afford to hire a lawyer and by heaven I'll get the best that money can buy!"

The man was in a towering rage.

McIver shrugged his shoulders. "You know your own business best, of course. But I'll give you one further word of advice. You may be keeping on the right side of the law, but you're not out of the wood yet. Margaret Elter kept on the right side of the law and you know where she is now."

"What do you mean?"

The man's voice was hoarse with anger and fear.

"Grey Face is no respecter of persons."

"Grey Face!" Ferguson's jaw dropped. "You mean the bank-robber fellow. It wasn't Grey Face who killed her?" His voice was thin and hard.

"It was Grey Face," said McIver, and he heard the other draw in his breath. For a second he thought that the bearded man was going to speak, but instead he straightened up; then, without a word, made off into the night.

For a moment McIver stood and stared after him, and then he headed in the direction of the village. He had been walking for five minutes when he heard it.

The sound of the automatic was borne to his ears on the night wind. In a trice he had turned round and was running back over the road. In two minutes' time he had entered the darkened strip of road, and here he proceeded cautiously. He was almost at the end of the strip and a shaft of moonlight penetrating the blackness splashed a pool of silver on the road. He was crossing this when he heard the

premonitory click of a gun-hammer, and in a second he had thrown himself flat on the ground.

Crack !

Crack !

There was a double flash of orange and blue, a double whip-like lash of lead, and the sound of the shots ricocheting on the hard metal road.

For a second he felt the ice congeal at his heart. He carried no gun, and there was only the darkness between him and death. He rolled over silently and listened.

Something moved on his right. Then again he heard a little rustling sound as the man retreated. The sounds disappeared and he felt pinpricks rise in his flesh. Was this a trick? Was the killer waiting for some movement of his to betray his position? The man could not know that he was unarmed. Possibly he imagined that he had been struck.

And then out of the darkness came two pinpoints of light and he heard the sound of an approaching car. In a moment more it was close to him and he jumped out in front of it and waved it frantically to a stop.

"McIver !" he heard a voice say.

It was Mr. Spicer, and Marion Campbell was with him.

"Good lord !" The American was agitated. "What are you doing here? What has happened? We thought we heard shots."

"You did !" said the inspector, and the older man was triumphant.

"What did I tell you, my dear? You can't fool me on the like of that. Not on gunshots. A man whose forefathers were the best pioneer stock in the West—no, sir ! What happened, young man?"

"That is what I wish to find out." McIver looked at the girl. "I wish you weren't here, Miss Campbell. There is a dangerous criminal at large in this vicinity. He fired two shots at me a few moments ago."

He heard her quick intake of breath.

"You . . . you weren't wounded?"

"Fortunately, no."

Spicer was excited. "Bless my soul, Inspector ! Climb inside. What is all this about?"

McIver got inside. "If you'll drive over this part of the road slowly," he said, "I'll be obliged. I've got an idea we'll have another stop before long."

They pulled away, and had only negotiated the next bend when Spicer braked suddenly.

"Look there !"

In the light of the moon the policeman saw a black bulk lying in the roadway, and over it a figure was stooped.

The lights of the car reached the scene and the man straightened to his feet. In one hand he held a gun, and he waved them on with this.

Even in the wan light of the night they recognized him. It was

Mark Kelman. He came forward and said: "Just a minute, folks. I wonder if . . ." And then he recognized them. "Good lord, Inspector . . . you!"

But there was no surprise in his voice.

McIver got out. "May I examine that gun?"

Kelman looked down at the automatic. "It's not a .38," he said humorously. "That man down there has been shot. It's Ferguson." He handed over the weapon.

The policeman went across.

Ferguson was lying on his face. When he turned him over he saw a trickle of blood at the man's mouth, but he was still alive.

"Give me a hand here," he instructed.

Between them they got the man into the car.

"You'd better keep back from him, Miss Campbell," he told the girl. "I'm sorry you had to see this."

She shook her head.

"I've seen a lot worse sights than that. I did two years at the Samaritan in New York." She leaned across and took Ferguson's wrist in her hand.

In a moment she looked up. "His pulse is almost normal. Where was he shot?"

"I can't say. I think we'd better leave that for the doctor to decide."

They were almost at the gates of Grey Lodge. Kelman said: "You can let me off here if you like. There's a short cut to the Hall through the grove."

McIver shook his head. "I'd like to ask you a few questions first. You don't mind?"

"Not a bit of it," said the American resignedly. He helped them to carry Ferguson to a room in the house, lit a cigarette and went down to the smoke-room. He was there when McIver came down, a calm and almost disinterested figure.

The policeman examined the automatic. It was a Colt, was old and had been in continuous use, for the butt was worn smooth with handling. It was clean, and the film of oil that lay on it was fresh. Very obviously it had not been fired.

"You have a police permit to carry this gun," said the inspector, knowing full well that the man had not.

Kelman nodded. "I have. That surprises you, Inspector, doesn't it? But I don't know that it should. I am a fairly influential man and I carry large amounts of money with me at times. What more natural than that I should be permitted to pack a gun?"

McIver handed it back. Chagrin showed on his lean face.

"It was very fortunate that you were so close at hand when Ferguson was wounded," he said with heavy sarcasm.

"I thought so too," agreed Kelman.

"How did you happen to be in the vicinity?"

The American shrugged. "I was taking a walk. I do that often.

I guess I walk in the dark more than most folks do." He chuckled suddenly as though a fleeting thought had entered his mind.

"You usually go out at nights armed with a gun?"

"Usually," agreed the man. He was laughing behind his blandness, and McIver sensed it. He nodded.

"Very well, Mr. Kelman. I think you can go now."

"Is Ferguson badly hurt?" The words were casual, but there was a wealth of interest in them.

"We are waiting for the local doctor to arrive."

"Then I guess I'll wait too," said Kelman. He went across and poured himself out a drink. "Will you have a spot, Inspector?"

He brought back two glasses.

"You know all this business intrigues me. What do you think is behind it? Margaret Elter was murdered at Cinnaford—and tonight Ferguson was shot at."

"Not to mention myself," said the dry McIver.

"You?"

There was a curious little intonation in the man's voice. For once he was genuinely surprised. "You mean that he fired at you?"

"For your information he shot at me twice."

Mark Kelman chuckled.

"You should thank your lucky stars that you are still alive then." He stopped with his glass to his mouth. "There's a car. That will be the doctor, I guess."

It was.

McIver went out and had a word with the grey-haired man of medicine, and he was waiting in the ante-room when the doctor came out again.

"How is he?"

The doctor said: "He's been lucky. The bullet passed clean through his shoulder and it touched neither nerve nor muscle. He'll be all right in a week or two. Just now he is in some pain and I've given him a quarter grain of morphia. He'll get another quarter grain later on. Miss Campbell has nursing experience and I've left a syringe with her."

McIver breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm glad of that."

"And now what can you tell me about the case? I'll have to make a report to the local police officer."

McIver shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't tell you anything. Ferguson himself may have a statement to make tomorrow; until then you had better call it an accident. I'll have a word with Haycock myself."

He saw the man out and went back to the smoke-room, and found Mr. Spicer pouring himself a drink.

"This place is beginning to get itself a bad name," he chuckled. "Talk about rural England! I'm thinking about hiring a bodyguard for myself."

"Hire Kelman," said the inspector shortly.

Kelman laughed. "I'm afraid I wouldn't be much use to you, Mr. Spicer. My day for gunplay is past. What did the doctor say?"

He seemed eager.

"Ferguson will be all right in a day or two. The bullet went through his shoulder."

"Gee! Imagine that! That guy really was lucky." The luck of the fortunate Ferguson seemed to rankle in his mind. He got to his feet. "I think I'd better be making tracks if you've no objection, Inspector?"

"No, I have no objection." McIver came to his own feet.

"I'll have to be getting along myself, though."

Spicer put down his glass. "You're not walking. I'll run you down. No argument, McIver!"

But the policeman was obdurate. "No, sir. I've taken too much advantage of your hospitality. Besides, I've got a little business to settle myself before I turn in."

"If I were ten years younger," said Spicer sorrowfully, "I'd try and help you settle it myself." He came to the door with them and watched them off the premises.

They walked down the long avenue together. Moonlight silvered the limes, and the mere was a flood of yellow light. Shadows danced in the woods, and the night air was vibrant with hushed, muted sounds.

They reached the Lodge gates and Kelman turned. "If you'd like me to, I'll walk back to Cinnaford with you. We don't want to have another tragedy. Another murder at the 'Grey Man' would put Voyce out of his inn."

McIver smiled bleakly. The man was laughing at him, yet he had his answer.

He put his fingers to his lips and blew a short blast, and something moved in the shadows. In a second more Detective-Sergeant Bragg had stepped out to meet them. He carried an electric torch in one hand and the other was sunk deep in his pocket.

Kelman was taken aback for once. "You've got your bloodhound," he said. "What did you do? 'Phone him from the house?"

"Just that," said the inspector. "And if he carried out my instructions he will have a gun with him."

"Trust me," said Bragg confidently. "What's up?"

McIver ignored his query. Instead he said: "You've got something belonging to Mr. Kelman, Bragg. You'd better give it back to him."

Kelman stared. "Something of mine?" He seemed surprised. Bragg took the watch from his pocket and handed it over.

"You dropped this earlier in the day," he suggested. "Outside Ferguson's room."

Not a muscle of Kelman's face moved.

"Did I?" He put it into his pocket. "Thanks. I shouldn't care to lose that. I haven't seen it since I lent it to Lord Cinnaford six weeks ago!"

He turned on his heel and without another word vanished into darkness.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

INSPECTOR WILLIAM MCIVER WAS MANY THINGS, AND AMONG THEM HE was a good detective. He had the cold, analytical brain of the commercial Scot, and nothing in all the world is keener. He sat up very late that night, and yet when Sergeant Bragg came downstairs in the morning his tall form was standing in front of the window.

He did not look round, but said: "Good morning, Bragg. I've got a job for you."

Bragg sat down on the edge of the table and swung his short legs. "What is it?"

"I want you to go to London and find out all you can about Dora Baker. Go to Somerset House . . . use the telephones, and find out all you can."

"Dora Baker or Wilson," said Bragg pedantically. "I get you, Chief. She was married at Ormsby. I'll have all the information that you can handle in twenty-four hours." He came across to the window. "What sort of a morning is it? Frost? This country air paralyses me."

"It doesn't paralyse your tongue," said the sour McIver. "You'd better hurry over your breakfast and get the early train. And, by the way, I wouldn't mention to his Nibs what you're going away for."

In such disrespectful tones did he refer to his superior officer, and Bragg raised a sycophantic eyebrow.

"Trust me! That bag of wind will get nothing out of me. Do I travel first?"

"If I can travel third, you can do so too," said the Scot, and the sergeant frowned.

"On an important job like this you'd think that the best wouldn't be good enough."

After breakfast he donned a blue nap coat, woollen gloves and a bowler, and McIver escorted him as far as the station.

"I'll leave you here," he said, after giving final instructions. "I want to get a report written up for Dimm. If you are back early enough tonight you might look around the village and see if you can scrounge a typewriter."

Bragg waved a lordly hand. "Leave it to me. I hope you'll be safe enough till I get back. If Grey Face bumps you off in my absence you'll have my promise that I'll hang him for it."

"Thank you for that kind thought," said the inspector, and took his leave.

He went back to the 'Grey Man' and found Dimm in a whirl of activity. There was a map spread across his desk and the chief inspector was bending over this when McIver came into the room. Two 'confidentials' lay on the desk before him and Dimm had a typewritten paper in his hand.

"Morning, McIver." He looked up. "The postman has just called. You'll find I've opened your mail. Where is Bragg?"

"I have sent him back to the City," said McIver coldly, and the big man frowned.

"I could have used him here. Can he use a typewriter?"

"No."

Dimm tut-tutted disapproval.

"It's a queer thing to me that senior Yard officials can't be allotted a competent typist. I spend more time writing letters than I do on an actual case."

McIver eyed the map.

"Are you looking for some place?"

"I'm checking up." Dimm was impervious to implied sarcasm.

"This has all the earmarks of being a big case."

"Superintendent Lynd has been working on it for two years," said McIver, and Dimm smiled in deprecation.

He winked one eye. "Between you and me, Lynd is too old for this sort of thing. The man's sixty if he's a day. What you want is young blood and fresh ideas. I've had a theory about Grey Face for a long time and I think there is something in it. Grey Face has a gang. If he hasn't, I'm a Dutchman."

"You are what you are," said McIver offensively. "If you've finished reading my letters I'll take them away with me."

There were two or three reports from Yard men operating in the London area. He read them through, and when he went back downstairs found that Haycock was with Dimm.

The young constable had heard of the attack on Ferguson and he was excited. "I telephoned Superintendent Page this morning, sir, as soon as the doctor made his report. The superintendent was most upset."

When he had taken his departure, Dimm was incensed.

"You made no mention of this attack, McIver. Why was I not told about this?"

"It is in my report," said the young inspector.

"Was the man badly hurt?"

"No. The bullet passed through a fleshy part of his shoulder. But it was attempted murder, for all that." McIver's thin lips curled in a little smile. "Grey Face seems to mean business. He shot at me."

"Good lord!" said Dimm.

McIver told his story and the big man paled. The idea of a mysterious killer who stalked his prey by night was particularly revolting to Chief Inspector Dimm.

"Are you armed?" he asked.

McIver nodded.

"Bragg had a Browning which I bagged when he went up to town today. I have instructed him to sign for another issue on my account, although I don't like carrying arms at all."

Later on he put on an overcoat and went up to Grey Lodge, and here the first person he met was Lord Cinnaford. The young man was cutting across the low meadow towards the house, and it was

evident from his appearance that he had heard something that had excited him. McIver deduced that he had heard from Kelman, and this proved to be the case.

"Good morning, Inspector." He waited for McIver to come up, and he was bursting with a desire to talk. "Mark called me up this morning and told me about what happened last night. A damnable business. How is Ferguson?"

"He'll get over it," said McIver, and the young man nodded.

"Thank heaven for that! This is getting to be a damnable place, isn't it? A murder and two attempted murders in a week. What do you think is behind it all?"

The Scotsman laughed. "If I knew that I'd have a great deal of worry off my mind." And then he asked a question.

Cinnaford was genuinely astonished.

"A stop-watch? Yes . . . of course. Why do you ask that?"

"One was found . . . it had Kelman's name engraved on it."

"Good lord!" said Cinnaford. "I'm a careless devil. Mark lent it to me a few weeks ago. We had an athletic meet in the grounds of Cinnaford. The R.A.S.C. team were competing against the Marines. I was timekeeper and I borrowed the watch—must have forgotten to give it back. Where was it found?"

"Bragg found it."

"I must thank him." Cinnaford frowned. "Queer, though. I thought I'd given it back to Kelman. Now that I think over it I'm pretty sure that I did. . . . That day we were shooting pheasants at Locksley Wood. I must ask him."

Grey Lodge came into view and Mr. Spicer was standing out in front of the house peering up at the windows.

He waved to them as they came up. "Say, here's a funny thing. I never noticed it before, but perhaps you know about it, Selwyn."

He pointed up to the face of the building.

"The wall of my bedroom ends six feet from that window there—and the wall of Marion's room ends about ten feet from the bow window on the left."

Cinnaford looked up at the grey stone. "Well?"

"If my mathematics are correct," said Spicer with relish, "six and ten are sixteen, and yet there is a good twenty-five feet between the windows on the outside. I stepped it out. That leaves nine feet inside the house you can't account for."

Cinnaford was perplexed.

"That is queer. Do you think there could be a secret room of some sort? If so I've never heard of it. I must ask old Davey. He may have a plan of the house tucked away somewhere."

McIver considered the walls. If Mr. Spicer was correct in his calculations, then it was easy to suppose that Grey Lodge held a chamber, the presence of which had not been suspected.

"How did you discover that?" he asked.

Spicer smiled. "Just by accident. As a matter of fact I never could understand why the bedrooms should be so small when they

appeared to be so much larger from the outside. I've remarked on it before to Marion. This morning I stepped them out."

He seemed pleased with his discovery, and added a further suggestion which had to do with breaking down walls.

Cinnaforde shook his head.

"I don't think that we should be so drastic just at present, sir. We may find an entrance-way, if there really is a room. I'll have a workman up one of these days and he may discover some easier method. Grey Lodge is a pretty old house and most of these old places had priest-holes. I shouldn't be surprised to find that it was something like that. Interesting, no doubt, but incredibly dirty most likely."

"I think so too," said McIver.

Spicer was disappointed. He led them inside to where pine logs crackled in a fresh fire.

"Ferguson is a lot better. Hayles is coming again this morning, and we'll have his verdict then."

Marion came in as he was speaking and the girl's eyes lit up at the sight of them.

"Good morning, Selwyn. How are you, Mr. McIver?" She sat down. "Ferguson is a lot better. I left him eating a light breakfast. I don't think there is much danger of a relapse."

Cinnaforde shook his head in admiration.

"You're a wonder, Marion. Most girls would be upset by all these gory happenings. You're inclined to revel in them."

The girl laughed. "I wouldn't say that. But it is exciting." She looked at McIver. "I tried to get Ferguson to speak, but he wouldn't say a word. He didn't seem to understand it at all. I suppose you'll want to speak to him?"

"I came for that purpose," McIver said, and she rose to her feet. "Come this way then, Inspector."

She led him upstairs and to a small but comfortable bedroom at the top of the house. Ferguson lay on a snow-white bed, his beard dark and silky against the covers.

"I've brought you a visitor, Ferguson. I think you may have something to say to Inspector McIver." She left them together and McIver drew up a chair and sat down.

Ferguson did not speak. The man's dark eyes were sullen but they watched the detective.

"Well," said McIver, "you had a narrow shave."

Ferguson said: "So I suppose."

The inspector leaned across.

"I think it would be a good thing for everyone concerned, Ferguson, if you would tell me all you know about this unhappy business."

There was a mocking, little light in the man's eyes.

"There's nothing that I can tell you."

"You mean to say, then, that you don't know who tried to murder you last night?"

Ferguson was silent. "I may, or I may not. Anyway, I'm not

talking to you about it. I can settle my own quarrels in my own way without any help from the police." There was a grim bitterness in the man's voice, and the Scot was not slow to sense it.

"That's ridiculous, Ferguson. The prisons are full of men who tried to settle their grievances by themselves. And those that aren't in the prisons are in the cemeteries."

The dark eyes lit up. "I can take care of myself," said the chauffeur surlily. "Don't you forget that, mister."

"You couldn't take care of yourself last night," McIver told him. "And if I hadn't come back when I did you'd have been a dead man. As it was, he all but got me too."

"You?" Ferguson stared.

"Yes. He fired two shots at me. If I'd had a gun I'd have given him one back. As it was I had to lie mighty still." And then he leaned forward. "Come along, man—tell what you know. This man is the biggest criminal of the generation. He's killed twice already and you were on his list too."

Ferguson was silent.

"No," he growled. "There's nothing I can tell you. It was a surprise to me. I was just walking down there past the Strip when I heard a sound in the road. I turned and saw a man standing there, and I moved away from him. Then I heard the shot. That's all I know. I must have struck my head when I fell because there's a lump on it as big as an egg."

This was true. The discoloration was only too evident.

McIver said abruptly:

"Very well. You're not a very satisfactory witness, Ferguson, but I don't want anything else to happen to you. I've got a mind to have a man sent to sit with you."

"A policeman?" Ferguson was startled. For the first time he seemed put out. "I wouldn't do that, sir. I don't want to give Mr. Spicer any more trouble than I can help."

"I was not thinking of giving Mr. Spicer trouble; my intention was to send you to the county hospital." McIver spoke plainly. He rose to his feet. "In the circumstances I think that will be the best thing to do."

He went downstairs and Spicer was waiting for him.

"Selwyn and Marion have gone out for a stroll. What did Ferguson have to say?"

"Nothing that was of any value." McIver was a little irritable. "I don't understand this man, sir. Grey Face must have had some reason for shooting Margaret Elter, but I can't for the life of me think why he should try to murder Ferguson. The man must know something, but he won't talk."

"Queer." The American was more interested in another problem.

"What do you think of this idea of mine?"

For a moment McIver was puzzled.

"About the hidden room? Oh, of course. There may be something in that, sir, because most of these old houses did have a priest-

1703
yes
hole, just as Cinnaford said. However, I can't see that that interests us very greatly at the moment."

"I'm going to have the wall taken down," said Spicer with some acerbity. "I won't tell Cinnaford until the job's done. Damn it, I can pay for any trouble I cause."

McIver smiled.

"I don't think you'll find much." And then a sudden thought struck him. He remembered the story that the kitchenmaid had told Bragg.

"Have you ever heard of a ghost at Grey Lodge?"

Mr. Spicer stood stock still. "A ghost? Good lord—no!"

The inspector explained, and Mr. Spicer was excited.

"I've never heard about it before. Why wasn't I told about this?"

"That sort of thing seldom gets beyond the kitchens," McIver told him pleasantly. "It is not likely that there will be anything in it. But it won't do any harm to question the girl."

"I'll have them up right away."

He would have rung the bell and summoned them to his lordly presence, but McIver restrained him.

"If you don't mind I'll see them in the kitchens. I know the mentality of these people better than you do, Mr. Spicer, and if you bring them up here you'll only frighten them and lose any chance of learning the story."

Mr. Spicer was easy to convince. "But I'm coming with you to question them," he said determinedly. "I'm not being kept out of that, at any rate."

They proceeded to the kitchens and arrived at a favourable moment, for the girls had clustered behind the pantry door to have a cup of tea. There was some confusion, but McIver, who knew his job, soon put them at their ease. Mr. Spicer, who had never been in his own kitchens for many years and who had seldom partaken of tea under such enjoyable circumstances, unbent.

"I've been hearing about this story that you told Bragg," he said, "and the inspector and I would like to hear it too. About this man you thought you saw outside my daughter's bedroom."

Liza was produced; a clean-looking girl with her sleeves rolled high to her elbows. After some hesitation and several false starts she told her story and McIver listened with interest. When she mentioned the blast of cold air he nodded and interrupted.

"You are perfectly certain about that?"

"Yes, sir. I noticed it on both occasions. It was . . . sort of frightsome, sir, because all the windows and doors were closed and it seemed to come from nowhere."

"And this shadowy figure was in the passage close to Miss Campbell's bedroom?"

"Yes, sir. Both times I saw him he was there."

"Why did you not mention this to me?" said Mr. Spicer severely.

"Good lord, we might all have been murdered in our beds, girl!"

The girl looked afraid.

"I didn't like, sir. I mentioned it to Mrs. Poole and she only laughed at me and told me that I was imagining things. She said there were no such things as ghosts."

"Nor are there," said the contemptuous Spicer. "What you saw, my girl, was a man, although who he was I do not know."

It was plain that she was not convinced.

They went upstairs again and McIver elaborated his theory.

"It is plain enough that the girl saw someone who had come from this mysterious room. I think we will do a little investigating on our own."

"Come upstairs," said Mr. Spicer. He was beginning to enjoy himself. "It's a queer thing, but I suppose you've heard queerer. Anyway, I want an explanation."

He led the way along to the corridor on to which both rooms opened, and opened the door into his own room. It was a large, comfortable room, but certainly not so large as the outside dimensions gave reason to suppose it might be.

"This is my daughter's room."

He went along the hall and opened the door.

Here was the room of a woman of taste. It was decorated in light pastel shades, and on the walls were a few water-colours, very evidently Marions work, for the girl's initials were in the corner of the one that was closest to him.

The detective measured the distance from wall to window with his eye, and there was no necessity for more accurate method of computation.

"There is quite a large chamber here," he said. "And it does not seem to be particularly well hidden. The most peculiar thing about it is that it has not been noticed before." He made his way out to the corridor and began to tap on the wall, but this yielded no satisfaction for there was neither hollow sound nor hint of any hidden entrance.

They were still here when they heard Marion's voice below, and in a moment more she came upstairs. If she was surprised to see them here she did not show it.

"We have discovered a secret chamber," said Mr. Spicer impressively. "Where is Selwyn?"

Cinnaforde came upstairs, and when he had listened to the unfailing logic of Mr. Spicer's exposition and had stepped out the walls for himself he became interested.

"I'll have Walkinshaw along as soon as I can get him," he promised. "If there is an entrance he'll find it. I suppose you haven't any idea how we might get into it, Inspector?"

McIver shook his head.

"I'm afraid I haven't. Secret rooms are not much in my line, and I don't expect that this one will yield much."

Mr. Spicer snapped his fingers.

"Say, why didn't I think of it before? The man we want is Mark Kelman. Kelman knows more about Cinnaforde Chase and Grey Lodge than any of us."

"Does he?"

McIver was interested.

Spicer nodded.

"He's made a study of this place. How he finds time to do so is more than I can tell you, because that boy is the busiest fellow I know. Come down and have a drink."

McIver shook his head.

"Thank you, sir, but I must get along to the 'Grey Man'. My colleague is in London and I am expecting a 'phone call from him some time around noon."

He went as far as the main door, and here Marion Campbell was waiting for him, and to his astonishment she said: "Do you mind if I walk part of the way with you?"

"Certainly not, miss." He was both surprised and pleased. They went down the driveway together, and when they had left the house behind, the girl turned to him suddenly.

"You're not too sure of me, are you?" she laughed.

McIver flushed. This tall young man carried in his lean frame just that amount of romance which was necessary to make life an interesting proposition, and this sparkling-eyed girl could have captured his heart very easily.

"As a matter of fact I'm not," he admitted. "Women don't play a very large part in my life, except in a professional capacity."

She smiled. "All I want to do is to ask you what you expect to find in the little room that lies between Daddy's bedroom and my own?"

He was astonished.

"You know of it then?"

"Of course! I noticed it after we'd been a few weeks at Grey Lodge. A woman notices this sort of thing more quickly than a man does. Especially when her concern is measuring carpets and calculating distances." She laughed at the comical dismay on his face. "Did you think that I was an ornamental piece, Mr. McIver? American girls are usually a little more practical than English ones." And then the laughter died from her eyes.

"What were you and Daddy questioning the maids about?"

He hesitated.

"Was it about someone moving about in the upper corridor?" she asked quietly.

He swallowed hard. "It seems to me, Miss Campbell, that you know more about this business than any of us. What do you know about this man?"

"I've seen him!"

"What?" He was shaken out of his natural calm.

The girl nodded. "It was several weeks ago. If you noticed, the woods of Cinnaford Chase are in front of us here, and there is a wonderful view of the Cinnaford chestnuts and beeches from my bedroom window. Just now they look bare and bleak, but six weeks ago this hill was a blaze of colour. I never saw anything more beautiful, and

I was sitting at my window painting it. I dabble a little in water-colours . . .”

“Go on.”

She hesitated. “I’d been there about an hour. It was late afternoon and the house was very silent, and perhaps that was why I heard the very slight sound that I did hear.”

“What sort of sound?”

“A very faint click. Something like a door closing.” She was looking out over the drab brownness of the low meadow now.

“At first I thought that Daddy had come up to his room, and then I remembered that he had gone to Winchester and did not mean to return until dinner-time.”

“What did you do?”

“I went out to the hall, and just as I reached it I heard a sound that might have been a footstep. When I opened the door I saw what I took to be the shadow of a man.”

He gave a little exclamation. “You did not recognize him?”

“No, I did not recognize him. At first I thought it was Joseph, and then something frightened me. I went up and looked into Daddy’s room and there was no one there.”

McIver said bluntly:

“You ought to have told your father about this, Miss Campbell.”

“I told Selwyn,” she said.

And then he remembered Cinnaford’s apparent nonchalance and understood it. The young man had been aware of the secret all along.

“What did he say?”

“He only laughed. Selwyn is inclined to be very sceptical. I suppose being a newspaper man makes him like that. Selwyn is like the man from Missouri. You have to show him.”

The policeman laughed shortly. “It might have been better if you had mentioned the matter to your father.”

“No . . . it wouldn’t,” she retorted. “I know Daddy. He’d have been delighted. He’d have sensed a mystery and turned the whole place upside down. More likely than not he’d have started in himself to tear the wall down . . . and anyway, the whole thing was so unreal that I couldn’t be sure that I hadn’t imagined it. I didn’t mention it to anyone else, because I didn’t want the girls to hear of it. You know what these village girls are like. They’d probably have refused to work here any longer.”

He nodded. “You were quite right there. Unfortunately one of the girls has had the same experience as yourself.”

“Oh!” She was surprised at this. “Who is she?”

“Liza.”

She stopped suddenly. “I won’t go any further, Mr. McIver. I’m glad that I told you. Now I must get back.”

“It looks as though you are going to have company both ways,” said McIver dryly. He touched his hat. “Good morning, miss.”

She turned and saw approaching the big form of Mark Kelman.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

KELMAN WAS BAREHEADED. HE HAD A SHOCK OF SILVER-GREY HAIR which he wore in such a fashion that a lock of it overhung his broad forehead. His dark, finely pencilled eyebrows were updrawn quizzically.

"Good morning, Maid Marion."

"Good morning, Mark."

He fell into step. "What great event has transpired that you must needs see the Bow Street runner off the premises?"

She laughed. "If you're going to be mediæval, I won't speak to you."

Kelman chuckled.

"Seriously, though, what did he want? Up to see Ferguson?" And curiously enough she thought she detected a hint of nervousness behind the question, although why this should be so puzzled her.

They reached the house and Kelman asked another question.

"Did Ferguson see who shot at him last night?"

"No." She shook her head. "He didn't see anything."

"Queer."

But she thought she detected a sense of relief in his voice. Of a sudden she said: "How did you happen to be so providentially on the spot, Mark?"

"Heard the shots," Kelman said. He did not appear to be paying much attention to her, and it seemed that his mind was far away. "I was out for a stroll. Fortunately I had a gun. I usually go armed, especially in the black-out, because I carry a lot of money with me at times and I visit some queer places."

Cinnaford and Spicer were coming through the hall together and her father hailed Kelman with delight.

"Mark! Just the man we wanted to see. What do you make of this?" He told the story of his suspicions, added a comment to the effect that he had suspected a hidden chamber all along, and announced his intentions.

Kelman was impressed.

"It seems to me, Mr. Spicer, that you have landed on something, but I don't know that I'd have the wall torn down by a workman."

"Walkinshaw can fix it up again," said Spicer comfortably.

Kelman was dubious.

"Maybe so. But a lot of these places are historically important, and you'd hate to do any damage that you couldn't set right. Why don't you get a proper man down from London now to go over the place? Somebody who has made a study of that sort of thing."

Spicer was interested. "Who?"

"Leave it to me and I'll fix up with a man. I know the very fellow for the job. What do you think, Selwyn?"

"I think you're correct," said Cinnaford slowly. "If there is a

secret chamber there must be some sort of entrance to it, and you want a practical man to find it."

Mr. Spicer gave ground unwillingly. "I suppose if you say so it is so. What brings you here so early, Mark?"

Kelman shrugged.

"Curiosity, I guess. How is Ferguson?"

"Improving. The doctor says he'll be all right in a week or so. Did you want to have a word with him?"

"I hadn't thought of it, but it won't do any harm." Kelman followed the older man up the narrow stairway. When they came to the door Spicer opened it and went inside.

Ferguson was lying back, his eyes closed.

"Asleep, I guess," said Kelman.

"Wake up," commanded Mr. Spicer. He prodded the man with a thick forefinger. "Wake up, Ferguson. Here is Mr. Kelman to see you. Mr. Kelman found you first last night."

This was the seventh time at least that he had mentioned this, and Ferguson moved uneasily.

"Yes, sir. I'm sure I'm very much obliged."

"What happened?" Kelman was blunt.

"I can't say, sir. Perhaps one of them soldiers firing a gun. A lot of accidents around the countryside these days."

The American sniffed. "I hardly think it likely. Not in view of the fact that Miss Elter was murdered so short a time ago. Have you any enemies that you can think of?"

"No, sir."

"You're one lucky guy, then. Well, I hope you take a turn for the better very soon."

They went downstairs.

"A curious fellow," said Mr. Spicer. "Not a very attractive manner, but he's a darn good chauffeur and I'd sure hate to lose him."

"Looks a bit of a rough hand. Say, you don't often see a man with a beard these days, do you?" Kelman was thoughtful. "I wonder what he'd look like without it."

Mr. Spicer was left to speculate, for Kelman took his departure, walking down the driveway and entering the wood. He walked quickly and in a short time the red roofs and grey gables of Friar's Hall came into sight. He went up to the library, and in this comfortable room there was a man waiting for him.

Kelman sat down at his desk.

"Glad to see you, Muller. You got my message?"

Muller was tall and lean and looked competent. He nodded his blond head. "Yeah, I got it. I came down here by car."

"Good!" The older man leaned across. "I want you to go back to London and get Finnegan to come down to Grey Lodge. The old man has discovered a hidden chamber and he wants to burst it open."

They exchanged glances.

"Spicer?" said Muller. He whistled. "I'll send Finnegan down at once. I suppose he'll know what tools to bring."

"He'll know all right," Kelman said. Then he grinned. "We had some excitement here last night. Someone took a crack at Ferguson and nearly got him."

"Fancy that," said Muller.

The big man chuckled. "The Bow Street runner nearly got his too. The big fellow—McIver his name is. He's the only one with any brains. He suspects me."

Muller laughed his short laugh. "You don't say! I wonder what could make him have that idea."

Kelman shook his head. He got to his feet and strolled to the window. "Come here."

Muller came across.

"That little cop who was here the other day told me something I didn't know. Somebody has been watching the house. He must have stood there for some time—yes, down by that big beech. There were four or five matches there and a couple of plugs of smoked tobacco where he'd knocked out his pipe."

The younger man rubbed his ear reflectively. "Who do you think that could be?"

"I'm not thinking." Kelman's face was cold and hard. "You know who he might have been. I'm not taking any chances. You'd better hang around and keep your eyes open."

In a few moments more he dismissed the man and went down to lunch, and he was finishing his solitary meal when his butler announced an important visitor.

"Chief Inspector Dimm?" said Kelman, puzzled. "I've never heard of him. Show him into the library and give him a cigar."

When he went down he was confronted by a large and imposing man in blue serge who wore the whitest collar he had ever seen.

"Chief Inspector Dimm?"

"Of New Scotland Yard," said Dimm importantly. "You are Mr. Mark Kelman?"

Kelman acknowledged that this was so.

Dimm cleared his throat. "I fully hope that any inconvenience I am causing you will be excused by the importance of my mission."

Kelman smiled. "What supremely important subject can you have to discuss with me, Inspector?"

Dimm coughed. "Chief inspector."

Kelman acknowledged his mistake and the big man nodded gravely. "It's one that a lot of people make, and in a fashion of speaking I suppose that it is justifiable. Still, the proper use of titles is a useful discipline and I am all for discipline."

"I see," said Kelman wisely, and wondered privately what this boring man wanted.

Dimm did not come to the point, for it was not his style to launch his thunderbolt before he had been impressive. For twenty minutes by the mantel clock he spoke of Scotland Yard and of its mysteries, hinted at its personalities and emphasized how they hung upon the slightest word of Chief Inspector Dimm; what he said to them, and the

terrible things that happened when his advice was ignored. Finally he leaned forward. "I suppose you will be wondering, sir, why a high officer of Scotland Yard should be concerned with a fiddling little murder?"

"I had wondered," said Kelman politely, and Dimm nodded.

"I thought you would. You must have heard of Grey Face?" He dropped his voice to a whisper as he mentioned the name; looked around as though he half expected to see Grey Face behind his chair, and then waited for Kelman to speak.

The American nodded.

"I'll say I have! Grey Face? I guess that guy gets into the papers oftener than any other crook in the country."

Dimm placed the tips of his fat fingers together and stared at the other impressively. "I'm going to tell you something, Mr. Kelman. When I read over the reports of the various officers who are investigating this case, I said to myself, 'There's one man who knows a great deal more about this affair than he is prepared to admit—and that man is Mr. Kelman.'"

Kelman's eyes were frosty. "Oh?"

"Yes." Dimm winked one large blue eye. "I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Kelman. I thought that you were mixed up in this murder. In fact I actually thought that you might have been Grey Face himself. . . ." He laughed heartily at this absurdity.

Mr. Kelman did not laugh.

"What caused you to change your mind?"

Dimm coughed. "One of my men has checked your alibi and it seems obvious enough that you could not be in two places at one and the same time." He produced a book from his pocket and leafed his way through it. "According to the report of Detective-Constable Marsden you spent the night at the Charles Stuart House, Sheerness. At ten o'clock you called Alan James, the manservant, to your room, and told him to prepare a bath for you at eleven. You took this bath and retired to bed, and James is prepared to swear that you did not leave your room. You were called next morning at six." He shrugged his fat shoulders. "I have been wrong about you, Mr. Kelman."

"Then what is the reason for this call?"

Dimm coughed.

"The fact is—we are rather at a dead end." It occurred to him that Kelman might think the less of him for this, and he went on to explain. "McIver is stumped. The county police don't know where to begin. I have a theory of my own and I think that you could help me very much. Was Margaret Elter your wife?"

For a second ice glittered in the American's eye.

"Did you come here to ask me that?"

Dimm hesitated. "Yes," he admitted.

"Then I'll give you a straight answer. No! I am not a married man. To the best of my knowledge Margaret Elter was not a married woman. Does that satisfy you?"

Dimm cleared his throat. "If you could——"

Kelman got to his feet. "I'm a busy man, Dimm. You'll excuse me, I know." He was at the door when he heard the Englishman's hostile voice say: "I'm a busy man myself, Mr. Kelman, and not an unimportant one. All I wanted was a little co-operation."

"All you wanted was a little confession," said Kelman calmly. "Now listen to me, you may be a big man in your own little pool, Dimm, but you don't worry me one iota. I'm an American citizen and I've met chief inspectors before—chief constables too. You don't cut one little bit of ice with me. If you're not satisfied with my credentials it is your job and duty to check up on me. Get in touch with the American Ambassador in London and see what he tells you. That ought to satisfy even you."

Kelman opened the door. His elderly butler was moving along the hall and he called him over. "Show Mr. Dimm out. He is not to be admitted here again unless she comes armed with a warrant."

Dimm went out, an angry man. He went down to the village, and here he met an angrier man.

McIver met him at the door of the 'Grey Man'.

"Come up to my room," said the young inspector. When the door was closed on their backs: "I had a telephone call from Kelman. He seemed damnably annoyed. What do you mean by interfering in my case, Inspector?"

Dimm was choleric.

"Recollect that I'm in charge of the Grey Face case—and remember that I am your superior officer, McIver."

McIver was not impressed.

"So far as I am concerned you are a lot of things—none of them flattering. I'm telling you flatly, Dimm, you're making a hash of this case. You aren't dealing with a tuppenny-ha'penny crook. You're dealing with one of the cleverest criminals that Scotland Yard has ever encountered. You've got to use brains."

"I flatter myself——" began Dimm, and McIver laughed harshly.

"That's the trouble!" He leaned forward. "Now I'll tell you something. You're a chief inspector, but you're nothing but a bag of bluff, and you know it. Behind all that talk and importance you haven't got enough gumption to back up your most primary convictions. I'm here in charge of the Elter murder case, and I'm running that investigation in my own manner. If you disapprove of that, there is one course open to you. You can communicate with the Assistant Commissioner at the Yard. Because if I hear of you interfering in my case or attempting to intimidate any of my suspects I am going to withdraw from the case and put my reasons for my withdrawal on paper before the Commissioner."

Dimm was white with rage. It was years since he had been spoken to like this, and the fury that was in his heart took possession of him.

"By heavens, I'll have the coat off your back for this! You can't

talk to me like that, McIver! You haven't heard the last of this! Insolence and insubordination! I'll have you on the carpet for this——"

McIver laughed coldly. "I'm prepared to stake my reputation as a police officer against yours—at any time."

"You young fool!" the angry man shouted. "I'll have——" And then he was suddenly silent, for he recollected that this same McIver was earmarked for promotion, and that important men looked on him kindly, and spoke about him when they sat in conferences.

He licked his lips and the spirit of battle went out of his eyes. Being a moral coward, he was a pusillanimous man, and he began to wonder just what would be said in the high places if McIver withdrew from his case. There was sure to be criticism. Dimm was not the most popular of men. He brushed his knuckles across his lips.

"I'm sorry," he said thickly. "I didn't think I was interfering in your . . . your case."

"Very well." McIver, having won his point, was inclined to be magnanimous. "I'll accept your apology."

Dimm swallowed. "If you think . . ." he began.

There was a step on the floor outside the door and then a knock. Voyce opened the door slightly and put his head through the opening.

"Telephone for you, Mr. McIver! Young lady from the Hall."

For some peculiar reason Grey Lodge was frequently referred to as 'the Hall'.

McIver went downstairs. The telephone was in a secluded corner and he lifted the receiver. "Hello."

"Inspector McIver?"

He recognized Marion Campbell's voice at once and there was a queer urgency in it.

"Yes."

The girl was breathing excitedly. "I had to call you. Ferguson has disappeared!"

"What?"

"Disappeared!" she repeated.

"Good lord! When did you discover this?"

"About five minutes ago. He'd been sleeping all the afternoon and Dr. Hayles told me to see that his temperature was taken at four o'clock. When I went up his bed was empty, and his clothing was gone from the cupboard wardrobe."

Here was the one thing he had not anticipated.

"What shall I do?" The girl's voice was worried.

"Telephone to the local police and ask them to look out for him. I will come up at once."

He hung up and went back to his room. Ferguson had disappeared! What did that portend?

He would have given a lot to have had Bragg with him at that moment.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE GIRL MET MCIVER AT THE DOOR WHEN HE REACHED GREY LODGE.

"Daddy has gone to Reading," she told him. "I thought of 'phoning Selwyn and then I decided against it. There isn't much that he could do."

He was glad that she had not done so, and said so.

She could not say any more than she had already told him, but she had called the staff together and had them waiting in the large hall for his questioning.

This was brief and abortive. No one had seen Ferguson leave the room. Ella had taken him tea at three o'clock, and then he had complained of drowsiness and had said he that was going to have a sleep. She had left him with that.

This was the sum of his knowledge when he went out to telephone to the headquarters of the Berkshire police. Here he spoke to a superintendent, who assured him that steps were being taken to watch the road and that railway stations were being watched.

"He won't get far," he prophesied. "A man with a beard is easily picked up." He gave it as his opinion that Ferguson would be found in a few hours, then: "Why do you suppose he ran away? He wasn't implicated, was he?"

McIver laughed shortly. "He had his reasons. Thank you, Superintendent. You'll keep me posted?"

He hung up and went back to where Marion Campbell was sitting in the library. He was on the point of taking his leave when the telephone rang again.

In a moment Joseph came in. "A trunk call for Inspector McIver."

McIver went back to the telephone. The voice of the girl at the post-office said in his ear:

"Inspector McIver? A trunk call has come through for you from the city. The party called you at the 'Grey Man', but as you were speaking to police headquarters at the time I waited until you were finished. Will you take the call now?"

"Please."

A country exchange had its advantages. It was Bragg. The little sergeant was at Scotland Yard and had just come back from Ormsby.

"Any luck?" asked McIver briefly.

"I had—and I hadn't!"

"What do you mean?"

Bragg elucidated. "Dora Baker died yesterday morning in the Ormsby Hospital!"

McIver drew in his breath. "What was wrong with her?"

"Enlarged heart. She'd been there for about a year and a half. I had a word or two with the Sister. A very charming young lady. . . . She told me that Dora Baker was one of the saddest cases she had had. A very quiet woman she was, and seldom spoke to anyone

at all. Until about a year ago she never seemed to have a visitor, and then a man started to call."

"Ferguson?"

"Yes. The description suits him. A tall man with a beard. Miss Hulme tells me that he used to bring her gifts and things."

"Honey and fruit?" asked McIver. He remembered what Bayliss had had to tell him.

"Yes—that sort of thing. He also sent the hospital authorities a cheque for two hundred pounds in recognition of their treatment of the woman."

McIver whistled. This was interesting. More than that, it was corroboration of his own theory.

Bragg had further information to impart.

"The woman died suddenly. Actually, she seemed to be in fairly good health when she took a seizure. She is to be buried tomorrow and the hospital authorities were wanting to get in touch with some of her people. No one has turned up as yet to claim the body. Miss Hulme was asking about Ferguson."

"I've been asking about him myself," said McIver dryly, and told of the chauffeur's disappearance.

Bragg was astounded. "Blow me down!" he said. "What do you make of that?"

The inspector had another question to ask.

"Papers? Yes, I enquired about that. Dora Baker had a tin box which contained certain documents. She kept it in her bedside locker. I asked to see it, but when she died it was removed to the treasurer's safe, and he was not willing to hand it over to me."

"I'll attend to that."

McIver spoke for a moment or so more, learned that Bragg would be back on the last train, and hung up.

For a moment or two he pondered and then made another call. The girl at the local exchange said: "I'll put through your call, sir, and I'll ring you when I have your party."

He sat down to wait, and had smoked two cigarettes before the bell rang. He lifted the receiver and in a moment more was talking to an official of the hospital.

Here he found a man, not a little awed by his name, courteous, and disposed to help him.

"I'll give you all the information that I can, Inspector," he said. "So far as Baker's papers are concerned, I will be relieved to have them off my hands. Your man wanted to take them away today, but lacking advice, I felt that I would be overstepping my powers if I handed them over. However, if you will send a man for them I will see that he has them at once."

McIver asked another question.

"Why, yes. She came in as Dora Baker. Did she have another name?"

"Her married name was Wilson," said the inspector. "But I don't suppose that she used it."

He spoke for a moment more and hung up. Then he called Scotland Yard and instructed that a man be sent to Ormsby armed with proof of his status.

It was dark when he crossed over to the garage with Joseph and examined the missing man's room. It was the same neat room that Bragg had inspected and there was no evidence here of hurried flight.

He made a brief examination of the box that Bragg had spoken of. The bank-book was gone and the box contained only a used envelope.

Joseph watched the brief examination and was able to supply the information that Ferguson usually carried a considerable amount of money in cash with him.

"It always seemed queer that a man like Ferguson should have so much. I've known him to have thirty pounds in notes with him. Many a gentleman doesn't carry as much."

"Few carry more," said McIver.

But this thought was disturbing, for if Ferguson carried a supply of ready cash he was not likely to be so easily caught. It might be some considerable time before he required funds and sought them from his bank.

He went back to the house and here he found Cinnaford, and for once that young man was excited.

"A rum business," he declared. "Mark my words, Inspector, there's more going on here than we imagine. What do you think Ferguson has been up to?"

McIver shook his head. "That is my biggest problem. By the way, sir, I am going back to the 'Grey Man'. If it wouldn't inconvenience you, I'd be obliged if you would drive me down."

When they went out to the car Cinnaford chuckled. "Have you seen old Mark?"

"Mr. Kelman?"

"Yes. He had one of your big pots up at Friar's Hall. Whatever he said, he seems to have put his foot in it. I've never seen Mark so angry before."

"That would be Chief Inspector Dimm."

That important man had gone to Reading. This he learned when he arrived at the 'Grey Man', and found Joyce wiping the top of the zinc-covered counter in the public bar. In some unaccountable way the little man had heard of Ferguson's disappearance and he was seething with excitement he could not contain.

"Is it true, sir, that Ferguson has done a bunk?"

"What do you mean?"

Joyce explained incoherently and the inspector saw light.

"It strikes me," he said dryly, "that your Ella Lane has very little to do with her time," and the man flushed.

"Ella's a good enough girl, sir, but her tongue wags a bit more than maybe it should. In a small place like this everybody knows everybody else anyway, and it don't really matter who speaks about a thing, because if you don't hear of it in one way you'll hear in another."

Cinnaford had always been a bad place for gossip. He himself was above it, being a city man, but in his wife's mother's time things had come to a pretty pass. He added comment to comment and McIver nodded.

It was after six o'clock and the moon was silvering the countryside. He went out and down to where the village post-office stood, and here he saw a car that he recognized.

Lord Cinnaford was inside the post-office. When he went in he heard the girl say: ". . . and asked about Ferguson."

For a second he stood there in silence, and then she saw him and paled somewhat.

"Go on," said the interested McIver.

The girl faltered. "I . . . I was only mentioning about Ferguson, sir," she said lamely.

"What about him?"

"Nothing, sir."

Cinnaford looked sheepish, but the man in him came to her rescue. "It isn't her fault, McIver. I asked the girl, and I guess she didn't think there was much harm in it."

"Possibly not." The smile dropped from McIver's thin lips and for two minutes he spoke in the stern fashion of detective-inspectors. When he finished the girl was tearful and repentant.

"I'm sorry, sir. I never thought I was doing any harm. It won't occur again."

"For your sake, let us hope not."

Cinnaford accompanied him outside. "You were pretty hard on the kid, McIver. After all, it was really my fault, I suppose." He grinned a little. "I told you before that I'd been too long a reporter to be able to stand on the side-lines and watch."

McIver nodded. "I know how you feel, sir, but this is official business. Scotland Yard is a little bit jealous of its privileges and it resents interference."

Cinnaford laughed ruefully. "Maybe you are right." He got back into his car. "One of these days I may be able to help you. Anyway, you can't say I haven't offered you my assistance."

He drove away with a wave of his hand.

McIver returned to the 'Grey Man'. Here dinner was awaiting him, and he was smoking a post-prandial cigar when Chief Inspector Dimm returned. That imposing man was in excellent form, for he had passed the afternoon in self-glorification with three bored officers of the Berkshire Constabulary, and he was disposed to be mellow.

"I've been thinking over this case," he said in his important way, "and it seems to me that you and I ought to get a little closer together on it, Inspector."

"To which case do you refer?" asked the careful McIver.

Dimm gesticulated. "This Grey Face business. I have a wider experience in these sort of matters than a man of your age, and naturally I can see the value of co-operation."

"Naturally," agreed McIver.

"Well, I suggest that we pool information." Dimm leaned forward in the arms of his chair. "You want to find out who murdered Margaret Elter. I want to catch Grey Face. We know that Margaret Elter was shot by the gun that Grey Face uses. Now if we add together what you know plus what I know, what do we have?"

McIver got to his feet. "If we add together what you know plus what I know, we'll have exactly what I know." He went across to the door. "You're interested in problems and theories, Dimm, but you aren't interested in hard graft. Well, I'll give you a problem, and if you can find a theory to fit it I'll be interested to learn it. Ferguson has disappeared. Where has he gone?"

"Ferguson! When was this?"

"This afternoon."

Dimm pursed his lips and raised a significant eyebrow.

"Someone has blundered here. Why was there not someone watching this man?"

"Why indeed?" asked McIver bitterly. He went up to his own room, buttoned on his overcoat and opened a drawer and took out the loaded Browning. He placed this in his pocket and went out. As he went he was turning over in his mind the information that had come through from the Yard that afternoon. Inspector Welling was a methodical man and he wrote reports which were very comprehensive.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IT WAS NOT OFTEN THAT MARION CAMPBELL WAS LONELY, BUT SHE WAS so tonight. Her father had not returned, had indeed telephoned to say that he would be late. Cinnaford had called at the house before dinner to tell her that he was driving to Reading to see an officer of the Rifle Brigade whom he had known in the States.

"I'm sorry to have to disappoint you," he had said. "But you know how it is. Cannon rang me up and asked if I could make it. He will be in Reading tonight."

"Of course, Selwyn." She spoke for a moment or two, learned that there was a possibility that he might even stay overnight.

She had dinner alone and retired to the library and sought companionship in a novel. But this failed to grip her, and after half an hour she laid it down and went upstairs. The corridor had been blacked-out and on her father's instructions a hundred-watt electric bulb had been introduced into the socket above her door. The corridor was as bright as day, and she stood here for several moments contemplating the panelled wall.

What lay behind them? Was it some old bolt-hole? Some dim recess where, in the past, a white-faced priest had cowered and listened to booted and spurred Roundheads as they clanked through the wide halls? Or was it something more sinister?

She began to slide her fingers over the wooden skirting, seeking any protuberance that might appear. There was none. The beading was plain and unadorned and so essentially solid that she gave up the task and went into her room, found a warm tweed coat and wrapped it around her.

Outside it was clear. The moon was rising over the woods and the spruce tops were touched with silver. Sellington Mere lay before her with the softness of dark velvet, its surface transversed by a path of pale lemon. She took a path that led her down towards it, followed its encircling sweep and came to one of the wide rides that cut the coverts.

There was a soft, sweet beauty in the night. The high beeches and lofty oaks towered above her, their blanched branches white in the moonlight. Underneath the ground was springy yet soft, crisp with the breath of frost and criss-crossed with great grey roots.

The wood darkened. She was among the spruce and firs now and the only light was an occasional shaft that glinted, spear-like, through the tree-tops. The air was alive with sound for one who had the ear to recognize the whispers of wild-life. She heard the soft coo of wood-pigeons, and the frightened scuttle of an occasional rabbit. Once a dark shape moved ahead of her, raised its head and sniffed the night air, and shrunk away into the shadows, and she knew, in the soft, muted rustle of his passing, that she had seen a dog fox.

The softness of the night brought her a new sense of contentment. There was a wonderful peace of mind to be found amid such surroundings. She wondered why men did not live more in harmony with Nature, why men shunned this quiet beauty and sought the swirl and spurious gaiety of the cities.

Ferguson crept into her mind again. Where was this strange man? Why had he left Grey Lodge so mysteriously?

She was pondering on this when she reached the stile that divided the grounds of Grey Lodge from the gloomier woods and policies of Friar's Hall.

For a second she hesitated and then climbed over.

She was not so familiar with this part of the wood, but the ride ran through to the rear of the house. And then a new thought struck her. It would be fun to call round on Mark Kelman. Mark would be surprised to see her . . . would possibly think her a little daring.

She went down the darkened path, moss-grown, laced with moon-patterns, and in a few moments more the square tower of Friar's Hall loomed up in the night air. She stood for a moment or so, drinking in the beauty of the night.

Friar's Hall was old. Its foundations had been laid by Norman masons, and in the moonlight there was a bewitching spell about it. The house was not large, but there was a tall *flèche* in the middle of the building, surmounting a small bell-tower, and this was silhouetted against the sky. There was about it that queer, lost air which very old houses always have, as though sad, ghostly eyes were contrasting present depths with past glory.

Something moved in the darkness!

Her eyes saw the shadowy form flit across the lawn and she stood and waited.

There was someone here—a man who was coming towards her and who was, as yet, unaware of her presence. Even in the moonlight she could see that he was a stranger to her. A tall, lean man who walked carefully and springily on the balls of his feet.

She noticed that about him instinctively. Years ago, in Kentucky, she had seen hunters walk like that when they stalked their prey. She began to feel a cold surge of dread.

He did not see her.

She let him pass, ten or twelve feet away, and for the first time she began to feel afraid. Who was this man who had come from the very shadow of Friar's Hall itself?

For a second she thought of running back towards the more friendly woods of Grey Lodge, but an abiding curiosity drew her on.

She watched him almost out of sight and then followed on behind him, keeping cautiously in the shadow of the trees. Then at once she thought that she had lost him.

For a moment she stood in silence, her cheek pressed against the cold buttress of an oak, her eyes searching the shadows keenly. There was no movement now, and the hush of night had spread over the wood. Moonlight splashed in patches on the mossy ground and the shadows were pools of dark velvet.

She held her breath and began to move forward very softly. Then at once she was alert and rigid.

A man was standing not six feet from her, and she recognized instinctively that this was not the man she had followed. He stood there, his shoulders braced against the broad trunk of a beech. His face was in the shadow, but he was a smaller man, his build more thick-set.

For a long moment she stood still, and then she realized that he was watching Friar's Hall. There was a keenness and an intentness about him, a vague, military alertness, and she thought suddenly of a soldier on guard at his post.

Who was he? Why was he here?

She felt her own heart beat more quickly. There was far more in this than she was able to understand. She wondered what Kelman would have to say . . . or Selwyn. Cinnaford was usually inclined to be sceptical of drama.

Then she saw the watcher ease from his position. Cautiously he slid from one tree to another, his eyes never leaving the house. Was that a chink of light in the bell-tower? It was impossible to say. Perhaps it was a moonbeam glinting on a window-pane! Perhaps it was imagination!

And then she became aware that someone was moving to the right of her. She saw a patch of moonlight disappear and a shadow darken. . . . Then the cold silver light again! There was no sound. The man moved with the silence of a prowling cat. She saw him close in on the beech and the shadows swallowed him up.

She blinked her eyes.

Had he been there at all? Was this a trick of the moonlight? She knew that she was shivering and that she was terrified in her own heart and soul! Not a clean, casual fear, but a dread that was born of something that crept and walked in the night.

The watcher stood still!

Overhead the stars were bright. Friar's Hall was bathed in pale cold light and the eyes of the holy dead looked down and smiled.

Something sang through the air!

She saw the movement of something black; heard the curious little thud as something struck the man from behind.

For a second he seemed to stand stock still as though surprise had frozen him. Then he crumpled at the knees and fell on his face among the frosted grass.

There was one second of petrified silence.

A dark, slim form stepped out into the light of the moon.

The very movement seemed to cut the vocal cord that bound her. She gave a choking little scream.

In an instant he had wheeled round. She saw him start towards her and she darted through the trees in an ecstasy of terror.

Fear lent her strength of limb, and for hellish moments she ran on, crossed the footbridge and darted down the path that led to the coverts.

This was her mistake.

In the open he gained on her. She heard the sound of pounding feet behind her. Closer and closer they came and she gave a last despairing glance over her shoulder.

He was closing in on her. She saw his arms stretching out to embrace her and with the fear of death in her heart she screamed again!

Another yard!

Someone rose up out of the darkness. She heard a startled gasp behind her and saw the tall figure rear up in front. Even in that moment of terror she recognized McIver!

Then in a second more she was in his arms and the shadows of the night were all merged into black, and her senses left her.

Walter R. Bishop

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IT WAS MINUTES LATER WHEN MARION OPENED HER EYES. MCIVER WAS still holding her in his arms. He had dropped to one knee and she was resting against him. For a second she remained silent and then she shuddered.

"Feeling better now?"

She swallowed.

"Where is he?"

McIver chuckled shortly. "Gone! He never stopped running."

He plunged right ahead in the darkness there. I couldn't have followed him even if I had wished to."

She was shivering.

"Oh! It was horrible! Horrible! Who was he?"

McIver said abruptly: "I'm afraid I can't tell you that. How do you come to be here, Miss Campbell?"

She did not answer for a moment. He was still holding her and he knew that she was trembling. Then: "It was just a chance. I was alone and I came out . . . just to walk." She looked back along the pathway. "I thought that I might call at Friar's Hall and Mark could have taken me home."

He started. "Kelman? That wasn't Kelman."

"No. I've never seen him before—but he came from the house."

She described what she had seen and McIver was grave.

"You saw him attack this man? Where was this?"

"On the other side of the house. No, I don't know who he was. I'm certain enough of that. He appeared to be a complete stranger to me."

The detective's arm tightened around her shoulders.

"I'm going to take you home, young lady. If I had my way of it I'd do more than that, but I suppose that it would be a tremendous breach of every form of good etiquette to chastise the future Lady of Cinnaford."

She laughed ruefully.

"I guess I deserve that spanking, Mr. Policeman."

They walked silently through the wood and soon Grey Lodge was silhouetted against the clear, frosty sky. The girl heaved a sigh of relief. "I don't know when I've ever felt so glad to see home, Mr. McIver. That experience has cured me entirely of walking by myself."

He laughed grimly.

"It was very fortunate for you, Miss Campbell, that I happened to be so close to Friar's Hall. But I wouldn't be so curious again. Next time you might not be so fortunate."

She nodded without comment.

Inside, they met Mr. Spicer, who had just returned. "Good lord!" he greeted them. "Where have you been? Joseph tells me you went out an hour ago. Where is Selwyn and why are you here, McIver? What is this I hear about Ferguson?"

In the library, McIver undertook to answer this barrage of questions, but first: "May I use your telephone, sir?"

"Of course. Of course." Mr. Spicer was irritable. He poured out a drink and drank it.

McIver gave his number and in a second, "May I speak to Sergeant Bragg?"

Bragg's voice was welcome in his ears.

"I wondered where you'd got to," said the little detective. "I've been back for an hour and Dimm has been telling me how he solved the Holborn Oval mystery. It was hell! Where are you calling from?"

"Grey Lodge. Come up and bring a gun!"

Bragg was brisk.

"You've got something, eh?"

"That remains to be seen," said the diplomatic McIver. "Don't put off any time."

"You can trust me," said Bragg and hung up.

McIver came over to the fire. The girl had left them and in a few sharp sentences he told Spicer all that he required to know.

The American was dumbfounded.

"A man killed at Friar's Hall! Good lord! What is the place coming to? Marion actually saw this with her own eyes?" He shook his head. "What does Kelman have to say about all this?"

"I am going to have Mr. Kelman's opinion before very long," said the Yard man grimly.

"It's incredible!" Spicer sounded a little envious. "By golly, McIver, I'd give a million dollars to come along with you tonight on this job!"

The policeman chuckled. "I'm afraid that could hardly be encouraged. By the way, have you a revolver?"

Mr. Spicer went to a bureau, unlocked it and produced a Colt and a box of ammunition. "I'm not really sure that I'm wise in showing you this," he chuckled, "because I haven't a permit to carry it here. Got it in the States."

McIver nodded.

"By the way, sir. Have you ever heard of Cameron's?"

"Cameron's?"

"The American detective agency?"

Spicer's brow cleared.

"Cameron's! Of course! Of course! Best known detectives in the States. They used to handle a lot of Federal work before that fellow Hoover came along with his F.B.I. men." Then his eyes wrinkled up. "Why do you ask that?"

"Would you be surprised if I told you that Margaret Elter had been a Cameron agent?"

"Margaret Elter?" Spicer's voice was astonished. "Now that didn't occur to me! Nothing like that. . . . No, sir!" He was silent for a moment, and when he spoke his voice had grown suddenly grave and serious.

"I don't understand this business at all, McIver. There's more going on here than meets the eye. Why should Cameron's be interested in Mark Kelman?"

"I'd give a lot to know that."

The millionaire shook his head. "No, sir. I don't get it. I've got half a mind to take Marion up to London away from all this."

There was a sound in the hall and they heard a voice.

This was Bragg.

"Well, well!" said the sergeant in a curiously refined accent. "I didn't expect to find you here, sir!"

Spicer chuckled. "Where did you expect I would be?"

McIver rose to his feet. "I'll be glad if you'll keep what I've told

you to yourself. I don't want that story to get around Cinnaford if I can avoid it."

They went out.

Bragg was reproachful. "If something has happened I think I ought to be the first to hear about it," he complained. "I'm not saying anything about Mr. Spicer, he's a nice enough man. What is all this?"

When he heard the story he whistled.

"A man killed in his grounds! Lord love a duck! Kelman will have to do a lot of explaining to talk his way out of that."

"We shall see about that," said McIver.

They entered the wood and took the route that the girl had already taken, and as they went Bragg told of his enquiries.

"It's pretty hard lines that this Dora Baker should die just at what you might call the critical moment. Who is she, anyway? Ferguson's wife?"

"I don't think that she was ever his wife," McIver said slowly. "Ferguson puzzles me. He's been in prison. I had a word from the Yard this afternoon . . . so your earliest theory about him was correct."

"What did he go up for?"

"Manslaughter."

Bragg whistled. "Get away!"

"Five years."

"Who did he kill?"

"He killed Dora Baker's husband," said the inspector, "one Peter Wilson, an ex-policeman, and I think a thorough rotter from what Welling writes."

Bragg said: "Then that explains what Miss Campbell told us, doesn't it? He hated policemen."

McIver nodded and said abruptly: "Apparently Ferguson or Fender and this Dora Baker were childhood sweethearts. However, Ferguson wasn't in much favour in the Baker household. Dora Baker's father was a sergeant in the local force and apparently Wilson's father was an inspector. Old Baker more or less forced the girl to marry young Wilson. Fender was in the Army at the time. I think that pretty well embittered him. He was abroad when he heard that the girl had separated from her husband. Actually Wilson left her."

"Go on!" said Bragg, shocked.

"From what Welling has to say, Wilson was a complete scoundrel. He'd already been discharged from the Force for bribery. Now he took to drink. On several occasions he tried to get the woman to come back to him and she refused. He seems to have been an ugly brute and he beat her pretty severely. She went to the police for protection and Wilson was sent to prison. That was when Fender got to hear about it. Subsequently, at the trial, he admitted that he had read about it in a London paper. In any event, he waited for Wilson to come out—waylaid him and gave him so terrible a beating that he never recovered."

"And he got five years for it?"

"He got five years," admitted McIver. "Welling says his Army record was good."

"What happened to the woman?"

The inspector shrugged.

"I don't know. She doesn't enter into the report any more. Welling mentions that she went to the States."

"To the States?" Bragg was interested. "With Ferguson?"

"Apparently not."

The inspector walked along in silence and Bragg followed on behind. Friar's Hall lay before them, silver tipping the crumbling stone edges of its tower. Soft clouds piled above it in the sky and there was a hushed air of tranquillity about it.

"Pretty as a picture," said Bragg.

McIver did not answer.

The little sergeant said: "Where did the young lady say this man was?"

"A hundred yards beyond the footbridge. She said that the beech was next to a three-forked oak."

"Then we must be pretty close to the place."

McIver nodded. It was bright as day in the clearing and he picked out the oak tree easily. There was a great towering beech tree beside it. This, then, was the tree under which the watcher had been standing.

There was no sign of anyone—alive or dead! The crisp, brownish grass was devoid of any mark or impression.

McIver said: "Well I'm damned!"

He went down on his knees and examined the ground, with the electric torch to augment the moonlight, but there was nothing here to interest him.

Bragg was peering around uncertainly. "We can't have mistaken the place. There's the footbridge—here's the three-forked oak. What do you think has happened to him?"

"Kelman may have taken him to the house."

"You think so?" Bragg was a little nonplussed. "That would be a pretty risky thing to do! He's bound to be aware that the girl saw the whole thing, and equally aware that she'd report it."

McIver got to his feet. "Unless the man wasn't so badly hurt after all. Perhaps he was able to struggle away."

"It wasn't much of a struggle then," said the little detective, "because there isn't a mark on the grass as there might have been if he'd dragged himself away."

"We'll find out."

"You mean we'll go up to the house?"

"Just that!" McIver was grim. "Come along."

They crossed the moonlit stretch of lawn and walked up the terracing, and a door loomed up ahead of them.

There was a bell set in the wall and McIver rang it. A moment passed and then they heard the sound of feet.

The door opened. The old butler whom Bragg had already seen peered out at them.

"I am Inspector McIver of Scotland Yard. I would like to speak to Mr. Kelman."

The old man hesitated. "Mr. Kelman is not at home, sir."

"Where is he?"

"He went out in the late afternoon, sir. He did not come home for dinner although I half expected him."

A door was standing half open at the end of the hall. Inside a light was burning and a shaft of it fell across the darkened hall. McIver walked straight up towards it and pushed back the door. The old man who was standing behind it surveyed him coolly.

McIver looked him over. A tall, fair fellow with cold, blue eyes and a tiny little scar above his lip.

"Who are you?"

The other looked him up and down.

"I guess that I'm the one to be asking questions."

"Then guess again. My name is McIver and I am a detective from Scotland Yard. You are an American?"

"Yeah!" The man's drawl was amused.

"Let me see your identity card."

The man produced it.

"Emil Muller, 44 Linden Crescent, Hendon," he read aloud.

"I guess that's correct."

McIver looked up sharply. "You'll have a passport, Muller?"

"Mr. Muller!" said the man coolly. "Yeah, I've got a passport and it's in order. Is there anything else you want to know?"

McIver looked around. There was an empty glass on a small polished table. There was a pile of newspapers, and a half-open book. Was this the man he had seen in the wood? It was difficult to say. Moonlight was deceptive.

"What are you doing here?"

Muller smiled.

"Staying here, I guess."

"You are a friend of Mr. Kelman's," said McIver—"a business friend, I presume? His lawyer perhaps?"

Muller rubbed his square chin.

"Well, if you put it that way you aren't so far wrong. Law interests me quite a lot!"

"I believe you," said the inspector. Here was a dangerous man—moreover, one who was not to be taken lightly. "Have you been out in the grounds tonight?"

"Me?" Muller was astonished. "No, sir! You might not think it, Chief, but I'm a family man. A good fire, a good pipe and a good book. That's me. What makes you ask?"

"A man was killed in the wood outside your window not much more than an hour ago!"

The American was startled. "You don't say! Killed? Who killed him? What was he killed with?"

"I'd like to find out," said McIver leisurely. Then he reached out a hand that moved like a leopard's paw and touched the loose-fitting jacket the other wore. "What have you got there, Muller?"

The man drew out the small rubber truncheon that the pocket held. There was a little glint of anger in his blue eyes.

"You pulled a pretty fast one there, Chief. I don't think your English law gives you the right to do these things."

McIver took the truncheon from him and weighed it in his hand. "A nasty little weapon. I'm taking charge of this——"

"Say!" The American was angry. "I'm not a sap. You haven't got any power to confiscate that blackjack."

"You may be correct," said the ironical inspector. "I may be exceeding my powers. Who knows? The question can be thrashed out by the proper authority if you bring an action against me. Incidentally, I am going to go over this house room by room. Have you any objection to that?"

"Have you a warrant?"

McIver smiled gently.

"For an American you're pretty well versed in English law. I have no warrant. If Mr. Kelman is annoyed, tell him to get in touch with Chief Inspector Dimm. He'll tell him that this was one of my bad days. Are you ready, Bragg?"

"I'm ready for anything," said Bragg.

They went out. The butler was still waiting in the hall, and with the old man they went over the house, opening doors, tapping walls, shining lights in dark places.

They came up from the cellars and McIver made his way to the room where Muller still sat.

"I'll give you a clean bill of health," he said, and the man nodded.

"What did you expect to find—a body?"

McIver rubbed his square chin.

"You've attended to a few bodies in your day, Muller?"

For the first time the man was flustered. "I don't get you!"

The Scotsman walked to the door. "Give Mr. Kelman my regards. Tell him I'm sorry I missed him."

He went out and left a grimly silent man.

Bragg was annoyed. "There was a queer fish all right. Who is he? Do you think that he was the man Miss Campbell saw?"

"Possibly," said McIver. "I'll shock your faith in me. I got such a fright that I was too scared to recognize anybody."

"I would have died!" said Bragg.

They reached the wood and strode along the path. The darkness of the trees swallowed them up.

Mark Kelman stood in the shadows. When their voices had died away he came thoughtfully back to the house.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MULLER WAS IN THE LIBRARY WHEN KELMAN ENTERED AND THE YOUNGER American turned to him in a rage.

"I had that copper here!"

"So I saw. What did he want?"

"Want? He searched the house. If I hadn't been snappy about getting that fellow out of here we'd be having a nice session with John Law right now."

"Who was he?"

Muller shook his head. "Never saw him before. There's a card in his pocket that says he's a private detective by the name of Harper. You can believe that if you like."

"I'll have a word with him," Kelman said.

Muller shook his head. "He won't tell you much. I hit him kind of hard. Gee . . . it gave me a shock when I heard that girl scream. For a minute I thought——"

"I know!" Kelman was impatient. "I wonder what brought her here. I'm sorry about that, Muller. I don't want her dragged into things. Have you seen Cinnaford?"

"I guess he went to town," the younger man said. "That fellow can drive." Then: "This cop is going to cause trouble. He's suspicious right now."

"I'll fix that." Kelman was frank. "I don't want him around messing things up. Scotland Yard take a long time to make up their mind, but when they do move, they move just as quickly as the smartest dick at Centre Street." He walked across and poured out a drink for himself. "Ferguson has disappeared."

"What?" Muller swung round. "Who told you that?"

"I hear things." The big man sat down and considered his glass. "I'm not surprised at that."

"Will he come here?"

"I doubt it!" He put down the glass and got to his feet. "Where is Harper? In the wood?"

"Yes, sirree! After seeing that done I wasn't taking any chances at all. There's no saying what might have happened. I wouldn't have been surprised if she had landed down on top of us with the whole darn constabulary."

They went out through a rear door and found themselves in the shadow of the woods which stretched right up to the grey walls. There was a beaten path here and Kelman walked ahead confidently. Through the thick of the wood they went, and in the heart of a young planting of spruce there was a stone cottage. Here in bygone days a generation of peat-cutters had lived. This he did not know, but the cottage had its uses.

Muller produced a key.

The cottage was small and in the breath of it, the atmosphere of decay. It was crudely furnished, and the solitary window was covered by a wooden shutter.

Muller lit a match and eventually a lamp.

"Here he is!"

In the corner a man lay on an ancient mattress. He was tied hand and foot and at their approach he wriggled round. There was a crude gag in his mouth.

Kelman nodded. "Take it out."

Muller did so, and the man worked his aching jaws.

"Who are you?" Kelman prodded him with his toe.

The man was silent for a second, then: "You've got my name. Harper." His eyes glazed over a little. "Can you give me a drink of something? My head is splitting."

The big man said: "What are you doing here—at Cinnaford?"

"I was sent here."

"Who sent you?"

Harper shook his head. "You won't get anything out of me because I don't know. I just take orders."

"From whom?"

The man considered him. "I'm not telling you anything at all, Kelman. I was sent here to watch your house. More than that I know nothing, and . . ."

Muller bent over him and caught him by the hair, forcing his head back. "I could get him to talk," he said savagely.

"No. Leave him." Kelman straightened up. "He'll be all right here, because nobody ever comes near this place. After he's been here a few days maybe he'll have other ideas. You'd better put the gag back on him, though."

Muller got down on his knees.

Kelman walked up and down, and it was evident that he was thinking. Presently: "We'd better get back to the house." He looked at Harper. "Muller will come here once a day to feed you. If you feel like talking—talk to him."

They locked the door and left and the younger man said: "What do you think?"

"Just what I thought all along. He's suspicious. That Harper has been watching every movement we've made. Say, that's one thing I owe that little cop Bragg."

Muller chuckled grimly.

"Yeah. These cops have their uses."

Kelman was silent for a spell. Then:

"We're going to have trouble before very long. I can feel that in the air."

Muller nodded. "It gets you like that. Personally, I won't be sorry to get out of England. We've made enough out of this as it is."

They went into the house and Kelman sought his own room. He was here for a long, long time, and it was very late indeed before he came out. Now he was wearing a grey suit, crepe-soled shoes and there was a gun bulging in the holster beneath his armpit. Cautiously he stole out into the night and the black shadows of the woods of Cinnaford drew him into them.

There was a path here that led across the brook and wound its way through a forest of spruce and chestnut to the very doors of Cinnaford Chase. Here, where devout men had once walked in meditation and prayer, he stopped to consider his ground.

The big house was in darkness. Moonlight silvered the scrollwork on the turrets and on the bell-tower and the buttressed gables shimmered in a white light. Shadows danced on the whiteness of the lawn, and the thin branches of high birch made a lacy pattern on the lichen-covered walls.

Kelman drew something from his pocket and bent down. When he stood upright again his face was covered as with a grey, transparent veil. He moved forward silently, merging into the shadows of the old building; blending into the curtain of jasmine and magnolia and neutral ivy.

In a few moments he had reached his objective. There was a little rampart here, and above it a window thrown out so that it commanded a view of the lawns.

He gripped the ivy and climbed upwards with the agility of a cat. When he reached the window he braced his feet in the thick roots and groped in his pocket for a thin-bladed knife.

In a few moments the window was open. He pushed it back slowly and carefully and turned a flashlight on the room within. It was empty, as he had expected it to be, for this was the butler's pantry, and it was remote from the staff sleeping quarters. Outside, in the corridor, was the switchboard which controlled the lighting of the whole house. He found it and switched off the power with the master switch.

Cautiously now, he moved out and along the hall. There was a great wide stairway and he negotiated this as silently as a cat. At the top the hall led to right and left, and it was to the left that he moved.

Cinnaford's study was on this floor, a large oak-panelled room. He reached this, found the door open and went inside. The room was empty. A fire had been burning and now the last embers of it were dying in the massive grate. A fragment of coal settled as the draught from the door reached it, and a little burst of flame threw shadows on the ceiling.

He moved around softly, tapping walls, examining crevices, and after a few moments made his way out of the room. Cautiously and silently he made his way from room to room, and it was an hour before he had completed his inspection. Then he made for the cellars.

This was more dangerous, for if he were surprised here there was no means of escape. For half an hour he prowled around among the dust and gloom of bygone years. There were dungeons here, where in older days recalcitrant monks had paid penance, and where miscreants had been imprisoned; low-roofed dens where darkness and filth had driven men mad, where lank-haired, dishevelled men had prayed for death and sometimes found life.

Minutes passed, and somewhere above a clock was chiming four before he was prepared to go. It was dangerous to remain longer,

for in a short time the day of Cinnaford Chase would begin again. There would be maids moving around from five o'clock onwards.

He made for the stairway, and was almost at the door when he heard a slight sound in the darkened hall above. He stood still and peered into the blackness.

There was no movement.

A moment passed . . . two . . . three! Had it been some trick of his imagination? Very gently he moved forward and edged round the door into the hall. Still there was no sound.

He bent down and groped with his fingers. He had 'pegged' the door before he had descended with two matchsticks and a length of black thread. Now his clutching fingers failed to find it.

The thread was broken!

One end of it touched his fingers. Someone had passed this way. In a flash he was more instantly alert. The sound that he had heard had been that of someone moving. He put his hand to his armpit and drew out the revolver, and then he moved forward.

There had been no alarm given! That meant that the man who stalked him was alone. He smiled grimly in the darkness and moved cautiously towards the main stairway. He was almost at the great newel-post when he heard the creak of a floorboard as someone stepped on it, and he wheeled round. The beam of a flashlight cut the darkness like a knife. Kelman crept forward, but the light picked him out and held him. He heard a startled gasp and then:

"Stop!"

Even in the moment of tension he recognized Cinnaford's voice. His arm came up and the light glinted on the barrel of the gun.

Crack!

The bullet tore its way through lath and plaster! The torch dropped to the floor and went out. Cinnaford jumped forward doggedly and then out of the darkness something struck him between the eyes and he went down, dazed.

Kelman moved like lightning. Below, he could hear the sound of doors opening . . . the mutter of excited voices. He ran upstairs, drew open the window and scrambled out.

For a moment he hung there in mid-air, and then his feet found a grip on the tough roots of the ivy. A moment more and he had reached the ground, and then he disappeared into the darkness of the wood.

Cinnaford was on his feet when the old butler, groping his way through the darkness, reached him.

"What has happened, sir?"

The young man laughed shakily. "A burglar I guess, Oake. I surprised him. He took a shot at me."

Oake had lit a lamp. "Something seems to have happened to the lights, sir. Perhaps the wires . . . a fuse . . ."

"Try the switchboard," Cinnaford said. "Likely he cut off the

lights with the master switch." He shook his head, for he was both dazed and sick. "That fellow certainly packed a wallop."

The old man went away. In a moment more the lights clicked on and Cinnaford saw the girls crowding one end of the corridor.

"You can go back to bed," he said steadily. "The excitement is all over for tonight. Yes . . . it was a burglar, but he must be far away by this time."

Oake said shakily: "Your face is bleeding, sir . . . and your eye is badly cut. I think that you should let me attend to it."

Cinnaford rubbed his bruised face tenderly. "All right—we'll do that. And I'll have a drink."

"Shall I 'phone the police, sir?"

"Good lord, no!" Cinnaford looked aghast. "They'd come up here in their hundreds. We'd have 'em trampling over the place for the next three or four hours and the man is a mile away by now. We can notify them in the morning."

"Very good, my lord."

Oake made his way to his pantry. Here, the window was wide open. He boiled water on a small stove and brought it back.

"The burglar must have forced my pantry window, sir."

Cinnaford was interested. "We'll have to have alarms installed here, Oake." He drank the whisky that the old man poured for him. "I think you should go back to bed now."

"You're sure that you feel well enough, sir?"

"Quite. Quite."

When the old man had gone he went to the telephone, and when the sleepy voice of the operator was heard:

"This is Lord Cinnaford. Give me the 'Grey Man'."

It was several moments before Voyce spoke to him.

"Inspector McIver, sir? Very good." He went upstairs and found McIver awake.

"Pretty loud bell on that telephone, Voyce," the detective said as he struggled into a dressing-gown.

"I hope it didn't awaken the other gentleman." Voyce was agitated.

McIver chuckled. "It would take an earthquake to waken Bragg and the chief inspector is always asleep!"

He went down and was surprised to hear Cinnaford's voice.

"A burglary! Isn't that a little out of my line?"

Cinnaford chuckled mirthlessly. "I suppose so. It is a matter for the Berkshire police of course, but I'll report that later in the day. But this was not an ordinary burglar. In fact he was a most extraordinary one. I saw him clearly in the light of my torch. He was wearing a grey sort of veil."

"Grey Face!"

"Yes, I think so."

McIver said: "I'll be up just as soon as I can dress. You can expect me."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MCIVER HAD COVERED LESS THAN HALF THE ROAD WHEN THE LIGHTS OF A big, fast-travelling car cut through the gloom towards him.

It braked and stopped and the wary Scot had his Browning in his hand when he heard Cinnaford's voice.

"Thought I'd come down and pick you up, McIver. Climb in." He lit a cigarette as he spoke and the flicker of the match showed up his face. McIver saw the bruise above his eye and the red swollen puffiness.

"You stopped something?"

"I'll say so!" Cinnaford grinned ruefully. "I've been a bit of a boxer in my time, Inspector, and I thought I was good. That fellow had a punch like a champion. I guess it was silly of me to rush him when he held a gun."

"Did he shoot?"

"Once! The shot ploughed over my shoulder, and I think that was what made me jump him." He settled down to tell his story. "Actually I wasn't long home. I'd been meeting an old pal at Reading and I didn't leave him until after two o'clock. When I was just about three miles out of Reading I met two R.A.F. chaps who'd had some trouble with their bus, and I gave them a hand for a little while, although it wasn't much avail. Finally I drove them both back to Reading and then came home myself. That must have been pretty close to three-thirty or four o'clock. I took the car to the garage, which is behind the lodge, and I walked up. That took ten minutes more. I was surprised when I couldn't get a light of any sort, because we supply our own electricity, and even in the event of a breakdown we have emergency plant. That was what made me suspicious at first. I started to walk along to the library, and I bumped into a plant-stand. Perhaps that gave me away. Anyway, I was still carrying my flashlight, and I figured I was able to handle any average man. I went down along the corridor and I was just at the main stairway when something moved in the darkness. I switched on my torch and caught him on the stairs."

McIver nodded.

"He fired at you then?"

"Yes. And I guess I got a scare and dropped the torch. Anyway, it went out and I dived at him. I thought if I got my hands on him I could hold him, but he must have anticipated that, for he was waiting for me and he knocked me flat. He was gone before I could stagger up."

"It was Grey Face, then?"

Cinnaford said: "I can't tell you that. But he certainly did wear a grey veil of some sort. It covered his whole face. But I didn't think that a criminal like Grey Face would trouble about anything he could find at Cinnaford Chase."

They pulled up in front of the big house and Cinnaford produced a key.

"I'm going to get burglar alarms installed here, and perhaps a dependable dog."

They walked down the hall together and Cinnaford pointed out the bullet-hole in the woodwork.

Plaster and chips of wood lay on the polished oak of the floors. McIver took a pencil from his pocket and fitted it into the bullet-hole, and the interested Cinnaford stood and looked on.

"What are you doing?"

"Determining the angle of the bullet." The policeman walked back to the stairway. "He fired from about here. Rather high, I should say. You must have rattled him badly." He came down again. "And now, sir, I'll take a look around. But while I'm doing so you might make sure that nothing has been stolen."

Cinnaford shrugged.

"There's nothing to steal. I've got no jewellery of any sort, and I question if there are fifty pounds in cash in the house—and that is in my pocket. That's what puzzles me. . . ."

McIver walked down the brightly-lit halls. So far as he could see, there was no evidence that anything had been tampered with. This was mystifying.

He was passing through a wide doorway when he suddenly bent down and picked something up.

"Where does this lead to?"

"The cellars." Cinnaford was serious. "I've never been down there—what was that you picked up?"

The detective held out two small matchsticks and a broken length of thread. "You must have interrupted him at his work. He seems to have anticipated something like that, for he had 'pegged' the door." He explained that this was a method used by policemen whose beats covered business premises.

Cinnaford said: "It's a new one on me. He doesn't seem to miss very much at all."

"What do you keep in the cellars?"

The young man laughed.

"You've got me there. But if you like to ask Oake when he appears he'll take you around."

"I'll go around myself," said the practical McIver. "No—you don't require to come, sir. I think you'd better have a rest. Your eye looks pretty painful. You ought to see a doctor."

"Perhaps I will." Cinnaford rubbed his face tenderly. He was beginning to feel a dull, throbbing pain in it. "Well, if you don't mind. You'll find me in the library."

McIver went down into the gloomy depths. Here there was little but old furniture, bottles and the accumulated refuse of generations. Dust lay thick on the shelves, but the floors were swept clean and there were no footprints.

He came back upstairs, a puzzled man.

Cinnaford was sitting in the cheerless library. "I can offer you a

drink. I don't know whether you care for whisky for breakfast, but it did me good."

McIver chuckled. "Personally, I'd sooner have some tea. I hear someone moving in the pantry, and the tea-cups were rattling as I came along."

"That would be Oake." Cinnaford went out and along the corridor. In a moment or two he came back, and the butler walked behind him carrying a tray.

"It was through Oake's pantry that the man came," Cinnaford said, and McIver nodded.

"I have already examined it. There are scratches on the metal of the window-catches. All that would be necessary would be a sharp knife."

He waited a moment or two more. "You will require to report this burglary to the Berkshire police, and I suggest that you do so as soon as possible. I will include what you have told me in your report."

Ten minutes later he was on the road back to the village, a thoughtful man. Had the nocturnal visitor been Grey Face? If so, what was the object of his visit? Was Cinnaford being quite frank about this?

It was six o'clock when he got back to the inn, and he undressed and went back to bed, and so tired was he that he was asleep almost at once.

It was Bragg who woke him coming in with the mail.

"There's a cable here from a fellow called Parnay. Edward J. Parnay. Never heard of him."

McIver sat up and took the open envelope.

"Some inspectors I know would raise hell about their subordinates tampering with confidential reports."

Bragg sniffed. "Some inspectors would raise hell about anything. His Nibs is up. I heard him complaining about the size of his bacon ration, and he wants a bigger fire in his bedroom. What does Parnay mean?"

"Parnay is a lieutenant in the New York Police Force."

Bragg whistled. "Oh, I see!"

The inspector opened the missive.

McIver Stop New Scotland Yard Stop London England Stop

Correct Stop Camerons OK Stop Making investigation Stop Will cable result Stop.

Edward J. Parnay.

He sat upright.

"Pleased about it?" Bragg was sour. "Personally, I can't make head or tail of it. What does it mean?"

"It means that we are going to put the handcuffs on Mr. Grey Face," said McIver, so softly that for a second Bragg did not appreciate the importance of the words.

"Grey Face!" Bragg gasped aloud.

He saw the look of surprise on McIver's face and he wheeled round towards the door.

Chief Inspector Dimm stood there on the threshold.

For a moment nobody spoke and then McIver found his tongue.

"Good morning, sir."

Dimm nodded briefly. "Good morning. I caught just the tail end of that remark, McIver. What was it?"

"I said that I would put the handcuffs on Grey Face."

Dimm purpled. For a second they thought that he was going to burst out. Instead he controlled himself.

"What makes you think that? Have you had any further information?"

"Lord Cinnaford surprised a burglar in his house this morning. The man was wearing a grey veil of some sort. Cinnaford thinks he was Grey Face."

"Do you?"

The eyes of the two men met and it was Dimm who dropped his first.

McIver said slowly: "I'm not sure. There's so much that I don't know. You are the Yard authority on Grey Face. What do you think?"

"I'll tell you when I see Lord Cinnaford," said Dimm. He turned as though to go, and then seemed to recollect what he had come for.

"There was a telephone message for you last night, Inspector. I took it because you were gone."

"Yes?" McIver was instantly alert.

"It was from Inspector Gracie. The man he sent to interview the treasurer of the Ormsby hospital was knocked down by a high-powered car five minutes after he left the hospital. More than that, he was seriously injured and a deed box he was carrying has disappeared. The Ormsby police have the matter in hand."

He went out and closed the door.

Bragg said dismally: "If that man isn't a Jonah, I've never met one!" Then his lips pouted. "Who do you think was responsible for that—Ferguson?"

McIver completed dressing.

"No, it wasn't Ferguson," he said softly. "How long do you think it would take a man to drive to Ormsby, Bragg?"

"About two hours if he knew the road. He'd have to by-pass London to keep out of traffic."

"Good roads?"

"I went by train." Bragg was bursting with a curiosity he could not restrain. "What was this yarn you spun to Dimm about Cinnaford? Why was I not told about this?"

"You were sleeping," said McIver calmly. "Frankly, I was glad enough of the chance to make an uninterrupted examination of the scene of the crime. Get your coat on. When I have had some hot coffee I'm going to do some checking up."

"Where?"

"At Friar's Hall," said McIver calmly. "I think that Mr. Muller will have a little more to say to me today."

He was mistaken. When they got there, Muller had left for London, and the butler could give them no information about the date of his probable return.

They were coming down the driveway when a big car passed them driving towards the house.

Bragg swung round. "Did you see who that was?"

"No."

"Kelman!" said the little detective.

CHAPTER TWENTY

KELMAN PARKED THE CAR AND GOT OUT. HE DID NOT GO INTO THE house but made his way to the rear of it, and entered the wood. In a few moments he saw the man for whom he was searching leaning against the trunk of a tree.

"I saw you arrive," said Muller, "and I figured you'd come down here. The cops have gone. You just missed them."

"I passed them," said Kelman shortly. He was a little agitated. "I love cops, but you can get too much of love even."

"There's one thing you've got to say," said Muller. "They sure are persistent. What do they want this time?"

"Checking up on Cinnaford's story, I guess."

But here he was wrong, although he could not know it. He took a wallet from his pocket. "Here is a hundred pounds. Go back to the city and see Sperry. He is arranging to have cars."

Muller pocketed the money.

"I won't be sorry to get out of here. What about this fellow in the wood?"

"He can wait," said Kelman. "But I can't. Take my car, and you'd better skirt Cinnaford or you'll run into some of these Yard men and be held up."

Muller took a pair of tortoiseshell glasses from his pocket and fixed them on his nose, drew out a gold shell and fitted it over one of his front teeth.

"I'll get by all right. What about Finnegan? He's coming down today to go to Grey Lodge."

"I'll attend to that."

They walked back to the house together and Muller got into the car. Kelman watched him drive away, and when he had seen the big car round the corner, went inside. Here he met a man who was mentally at sea.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the butler said, "but I have carried out your instructions. I have done so, sir, because I consider it my duty

to serve my employer. But it has never been my duty before to mislead police officers. You have been very generous, sir, and I have found no fault with the treatment that I have received. Despite that, I should like to give notice of my intention to leave your employment."

Kelman rubbed his chin.

"You don't like the way I act, eh?"

"I don't like the way I have to act," the old man corrected.

"Very well." Kelman was brisk. "You may leave at any time. There is no need to finish out the month. If you require a reference, see me later."

He went to his own room. So the staff was feeling like that? It worried him little. In any event, Cinnaford would have to find him another butler, for he had taken over Friar's Hall as it stood.

He went through to his room and changed into a light sports suit and a few moments later he was on the way to Grey Lodge, and here he was met by the one man he would have avoided.

Lord Cinnaford's eye was bruised and swollen, and, despite the attention of the local doctor, it had blackened.

"Good lord!" said the American. "What happened?"

Marion Campbell told him.

"Selwyn had a burglar, Mark."

"A burglar? At Cinnaford Chase?" Kelman's fresh complexion seemed to pale. "When was this?"

"Last night."

The big man stared. "Well I'm damned! Say, I wonder if that was . . . No . . . it couldn't have been!"

"What?"

Kelman jerked his head. "I've got a friend at Friar's Hall. An American friend—a client, really. Last night I was called away and poor old Van Wagoner was left alone. It seems he took a walk in the moonlight, and he got a bit of a scare. He thought he saw a figure running through the trees. After that he heard a woman scream."

Marion Campbell said nothing.

"I told him it was imagination." The big man's jovial face was wreathed in a deprecating smile. "He's a timid sort of fellow at the best of times." He looked at Cinnaford. "I don't suppose that that would have anything to do with your burglary?"

Cinnaford shook his head.

"I don't know, Mark. But this place is beginning to get me down. I've got an idea I'd like to get away from it for a spell." His voice was quite frank. "Marion and I have decided to get married right away and have a trip up to Scotland."

"What?"

The girl nodded. She was smiling now. "Surprised, Mark?"

Kelman shook his head.

"Say, that's real news. I'm glad to hear it." He held out his hand, and then she saw his face change colour as Cinnaford took it.

"What's wrong, Mark?"

"Nothing." The sweat was breaking on his brow. He put his hand into his pocket. "A little touch of my heart, I guess. You didn't know I was troubled that way, did you?"

She shook her head.

"No. I never thought it of you. You must lead pretty hectic lives back home, when so many hearts give out."

Cinnaford chuckled.

"That's a dig at me—but I'll let it pass. I'm too happy to take umbrage."

"You should be!" Kelman spoke harshly. Then he turned on his heel and walked across to the door. "I want to see your father, Marion."

"You'll find him in the study. There's a man with him. A funny little man called Lannigan."

"Finnegan," corrected Cinnaford.

Kelman left them and went down towards the study. There was a stabbing pain in his hand. That was where he had struck Cinnaford last night. He took his hand out of his pocket and massaged his fingers gently. The bone of his forefinger was cracked. He could feel the ridge quite plainly.

Mr. Spicer was standing, legs astride, his coat-tails parted, before the fire. A bald-headed little man in a blue serge suit was sitting—an interested listener.

"It was my idea to tear down the wall," Spicer was saying, "but other counsels prevailed. I'm not saying yet I was wrong."

Mr. Spicer never said at any time he was wrong.

Finnegan nodded.

"I've done this sort of thing before, sir. You leave it to me. Secret doors . . . secret panels . . . secret chambers. Who did they send for when they found that hidden closet at the Dook of Galloway's? Who did Sir Oscar Rathay bring in when they suspected there was a hidden compartment behind the still-room door?"

"You?" hazarded Mr. Spicer, and Finnegan nodded.

They both turned at the sound of a step.

"I hope I'm not intruding," said Kelman.

"Come in, Mark, come in. This is Finnegan."

"So I gathered," said Mark dryly.

The little man got to his feet. "I'll get to work, sir. I've got a case of tools with me, and if you show me the spot I'll guarantee that if there is a way in I'll find it."

Spicer rang a bell, and when Joseph came gave certain explicit instructions. Then he turned to Kelman.

"Sit down, Mark. I want to talk to you."

Kelman sat down.

Spicer said slowly: "Has Marion told you what happened to her last night at Friar's Hall?"

No."

Kelman's face was puzzled. "What do you mean?"

The older man said bluntly: "I'll tell you what I mean. There's a

killer here at Cinnaford! I'm not a man who scares easily, Kelman, but I'm scared right now! That girl of mine was nearly murdered last night! If it hadn't been for McIver—well, she would have shared Margaret Elter's fate."

"Good lord!"

Spicer said: "I'll tell you about it."

When he had finished Kelman shook his head.

"Well I'm damned! As you say, sir, the place is getting to be too dangerous for any of us. It's a queer thing to me that all this sort of thing can go on under the nose of Scotland Yard. I guess these English cops aren't all they're cracked up to be."

"That's a debatable point," said Mr. Spicer, but did not delay to debate it. "Anyway, I've talked things over with Selwyn and Marion. Selwyn wants to be married right away and I think it wise. I'm giving my consent and Marion is willing. Selwyn is going to see the bishop today sometime. We'll get the young couple off our hands and get this whole damned thing cleared up."

"Have you told McIver about this?"

"Not yet. Naturally I mean to—but I haven't had time. As a matter of fact we only decided an hour ago."

"Cinnaford has had an experience too. That's a nasty bruise he has."

The old man nodded. "He was lucky to get away with a black eye. Do you know who the burglar was?"

Kelman professed ignorance.

"Grey Face!"

"What?"

Mr. Spicer struck his palm with a clenched fist.

"Grey Face! There's something damnable behind this. Margaret Elter is dead! Ferguson was shot at and has disappeared. McIver was shot at! Marion was terrified out of her wits by what she saw last night, and now there is this attack on Cinnaford."

"What do the police say about it?"

"I haven't seen McIver. Selwyn had Chief Inspector Dimm up all the morning and I think left him at Cinnaford Chase when he came here. Dimm has an idea that there is a Grey Face gang."

"Maybe he's right there."

Kelman got to his feet. "You've got me interested, Mr. Spicer. What can there be about Cinnaford that could interest any criminal gang?"

Mr. Spicer shrugged. "Whatever it is, it has to do with money." He changed the subject. "We'll go along and see Finnegan at work. I've got a theory that there may be hidden treasure here, Kelman. Nothing else could explain it. It's a theory I share with Chief Inspector Dimm."

"Maybe." Kelman was non-committal. He looked up and along the corridor. "Listen! What's that tapping?"

The tapping was Finnegan.

The little man had stripped his coat. His sleeves were rolled up

over thin, freckled arms. He had a slim-handled hammer in his hand, and the shaft of this was surmounted by a small head. He moved along the panelled walls, tapping delicately and listening with his ear close to the wood.

Mr. Spicer was a fascinated watcher.

"What do you expect to hear?"

The little man looked round. "I don't quite know, sir," he said frankly. "I'm trying to find a hollow spot of course, but it isn't easy. I've got to get my ear accustomed to the sound of the wood. Different woods sound differently. Walnut has a lighter sound than oak, and it fools you easily."

He went back to his task and they watched him for a few moments. It was warm work and the perspiration was oozing on the man's forehead.

A step sounded behind them and they turned to see Sergeant Bragg coming up the hall. Marion Campbell was with him and they were talking as they approached.

Kelman would have given a great deal to have heard what they were saying, for it was easy to suppose, by their covert glances in his direction, that they were discussing him.

"Good morning, sir." Bragg was deferential to Spicer and determined to be comradely to Kelman. "Queer business that at Friar's Hall last night. We can't make much out of it."

"That I can believe." Kelman was amused. Then he chuckled. "You may be able to make more out of it if Finnegan has any success here."

Bragg watched the little man with interest.

"Who is he?"

Mr. Spicer peered over his glasses. "A friend of Kelman's."

"An acquaintance," murmured Kelman.

"Oh?"

It was impossible not to notice the suspicion, wariness and general caution in Bragg's voice. He watched the little man carefully for a moment or two longer and then:

"What do you do when you're not looking for secret doors?"

Finnegan did not look round. "I'm a cabinet-maker—sir."

"You ever opened a safe?"

Finnegan's shoulders moved. He still averted his head. "No, sir . . . nothing in that line. I've worked on locks a lot, though. As a matter of fact they used to call me Doctor Locks because I was so good."

"You've got a high opinion of yourself!" said Bragg. He came back to a more practical subject. "What do you expect to find when you do get behind that wall?"

Spicer said testily: "How should the man know that?"

"I had an idea that he might," said Bragg, who was not thin-skinned. "Especially since he's such a card at his job." And then: "What's the matter with your hand, Mr. Kelman?"

Kelman started.

He had been raising his hand to his lips, unconscious that the sharp eyes of the detective were on him. He looked down at his bruised knuckles.

"Nothing at all!"

"Your hand looks like you'd taken a crack at someone."

Kelman flexed his fingers. "Funny that you should think that. As a matter of fact I had a rap on the knuckles with the starting-handle of my car."

"I thought you had a self-starter?" said the blunt detective, and Kelman coloured.

"I have. But the battery is low and won't turn her over." And then he said half angrily: "Damn it all, man, you aren't telling me you don't believe me?"

"No, I'm not telling you," said the little sergeant.

Spicer poured oil on the troubled waters. "I think that every one of us is upset," he said. "Bragg doesn't mean anything, Mark. Don't be so jumpy. You'd think that you had something to hide."

"I'm sorry." Kelman had regained his composure, and when he was himself no man was more composed.

"I accept your apology," said Bragg.

"Where's Cinnaford?"

It was Mr. Spicer who asked the question. He looked at his daughter querulously.

"Selwyn left as Sergeant Bragg came in," the girl said, and her father snapped his fingers.

"That's annoying. I want to talk to him about this wedding business. Will he be back?"

"I don't know," she said wearily.

"He'll be back all right." Kelman's voice sounded sour. "I think that——"

What he thought he never disclosed. There was a click, and a thin section of panelling slipped downwards. They heard a soft, creaking sound and a blast of cold air touched them.

Finnegan's voice said throatily: "There you go, sir! Like I said!"

Nobody moved.

The door swung wider and Bragg, groping in his pocket, produced a torch and flashed it into the cavity.

Kelman took one step forward and the little detective caught him by the arm.

"Stand still!" he said.

For once the American obeyed him and then the sergeant looked at Mr. Spicer.

"Take Miss Campbell away."

The millionaire stared, and something in Bragg's voice made him obey without question.

When they had gone out of sight Kelman said thickly: "What is it, Bragg?"

The sergeant smiled bleakly.

"Ferguson! And he's dead!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FOR A LONG SECOND KELMAN WAS SILENT. THEN HE LICKED HIS LIPS.

"Dead?" he said hoarsely.

"Dead!" said Bragg.

The big man took a step forward. "Let me see him."

"Don't go inside," Bragg warned. He turned his light on the opening and Kelman peered over his shoulder.

Ferguson lay on his face. There was a little pool of blood on the dust-covered floor and the knife that had killed him was still in his heart.

The big man stared silently and then heard Bragg speaking.

"Go down and telephone Mr. McIver."

Kelman went down without a word. Presently he came back and Spicer was along with him. The older man was grey and shaken. "This is horrible!" he burst out. "My heaven, Kelman, this place is cursed! How many more people are going to lose their lives?"

Kelman made no answer.

"How did he get there?"

Bragg said firmly: "We'll settle those sort of questions later, sir. You'll be wise if you say nothing about the matter at all. If the servants get to hear about this you'll have hysterical women on your hands."

They recognized the truth of this and Spicer said: "I'll go down to the library. Dammit, I need a drink of some sort. Finnegan, come with me."

Kelman remained. He lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall in silence. Bragg stood with his thick shoulders against the opening. In ten minutes' time they heard the sound of a car and then voices, among them Dimm's. Chief Inspector Dimm came striding upstairs towards them, glanced sharply to right and left and, seeing Kelman, froze into rigidity.

"Where's the body?"

"In here," said Bragg.

The big man would have brushed past but the sergeant barred the way. "Easy, sir. There are footprints in the dust."

McIver came up and relieved the tension. "Ferguson, eh? I suspected something like that." He looked sharply at Kelman. "Where were you, Mr. Kelman, when the body was found?"

"With Sergeant Bragg." Kelman was cool.

"Go down to the library. I will see you there later."

Dimm was fuming at the effrontery that had been shown him.

"By heavens, McIver, I'm going to have you on the carpet for this treatment! You uphold Bragg in openly insulting me in front of a civilian! You seem to forget that I am in charge of——"

"I'm forgetting nothing," said McIver wearily. He pushed open the door and looked down at the dead man.

"Poor devil. A knife! He's been dead for some time now. I should say that he was murdered soon after he disappeared."

"Who did it?" It was Dimm who spoke.

"Grey Face," said McIver shortly.

The big man started. "You think so?"

"There are footprints," said Bragg. He pointed to some faint marks in the dust and McIver nodded.

"Obviously some of them will be his own. The others belong to Grey Face." He peered into the darkness of the passageway. "Go down and telephone to the Berkshire police, Bragg. Then come back here."

When the sergeant came back he found that McIver had procured two powerful electric torches, and Dimm was carrying one of these.

The young inspector said: "We'll follow out this passage. There must be a ladder here. Be careful!" He shone his light in the darkness and a void opened blackly below. The topmost rung of a rusty iron ladder could be seen plainly. He gripped it and went over, and Dimm shone his light to illuminate the way.

In a moment or two they heard McIver's voice. "I'm at the bottom. Be careful, because there's a drop of at least fifty feet. The ladder is quite sound."

In a few moments Bragg and Dimm had joined him. There was no dust here. The low-roofed tunnel was beaded with moisture and the crude bricks that lined it were crumbling and rotten.

"We're under the house," McIver said. "I've always figured this place existed. Actually I got a book at the local library which dealt with Cinnaford Chase and it mentioned an old secret passage connecting it with both Grey Lodge and Friar's Hall."

Dimm said: "Where does this lead to?"

"Either to the Chase or to Friar's Hall. It would be built in the troubled days of the Church. The three houses form a triangle, and are only a quarter of a mile apart. They would all be connected at one time, but I am inclined to think that the other passages may have fallen in."

They moved along carefully, the torch lighting every step of their way. Here was evidence of the work of labourers whose bones were now dust. At intervals there were niches cut in the solid earth, and in some of these great masses of stone.

McIver pointed to them. "These could be used to block the tunnel, I fancy." He froze suddenly. "Did you hear something?"

Neither of them had.

Dimm cleared his throat preparatory to making a statement. "It seems to me, McIver, that we might have been wise to wait until the Berkshire police arrived. If we are surprised in this tunnel we would have a very poor chance."

"You could go back and remain with Ferguson," said McIver thoughtfully.

Dimm shivered and was silent.

For a moment or two nobody spoke and then Bragg said: "We must be pretty close to one of the other houses now. I wouldn't

mind betting this place takes us out at Friar's Hall." His voice softened. "I wonder if we'll come across another body, Inspector?"

"Whom are you thinking of?"

"The man that Miss Campbell saw."

McIver shook his head. "You might find him here, but I doubt it. Anyway, I don't think that he'll be dead!"

"Why not?" Bragg was considerably astonished.

McIver chuckled.

"I've got my reasons."

Dimm broke in irritably. "I must say that I am completely in the dark. I don't understand any of this at all."

"You surprise me, sir," said the polite McIver.

They were ascending now, and steps had been shaped out of dry crumbling earth. Here and there some stone step was wet. What hands had held the chisel that had shaped these?

"We are under the house," McIver said slowly. "Notice how the tunnel is dry. There will be some sort of stairway along here—or another ladder."

This was so. Twenty or thirty feet ahead they saw stone steps, their edges crumbling to dust. They went up slowly and carefully and twice McIver stopped to point to footprints in the dust.

"He came this way often, I suppose."

Dimm had dropped to the rear now. There was an odd look in the chief inspector's eye. And once he halted and felt in his pocket. Now he drew out the long-barrelled gun and slipped the safety-catch.

There was a sharp rise now. The steps led upwards more steeply and then ended on a little platform. McIver looked around him and whispered: "This is the end of the passage. We go through one of those walls."

He swung the light round. It was easy to see the entrance. There was a round-topped door cut out of the stone. A metal ring was attached to the stone, and when he drew on it it opened up easily. Behind it was unvarnished oak, dark with the grime of years. His fingers sought along the slotted edge for a grip, and in a moment he had found it.

The panel slid back gently, and bending his head he stepped out into a carpeted room which was lined with books. They followed him out and Dimm blinked in the light of a frosty sun.

"Where are we?"

McIver did not speak. He was walking round the room carefully, his face a little puzzled. There was a huge kidney desk, and he went over to this, opened a drawer and stared at the litter of papers. Then he closed it.

A carved ebony box was in one corner of the room. The anxious Bragg opened it. "What's this?"

He dragged out a red cloak and a hat, a false beard.

McIver came across and examined the contents of the box. He fingered the beard. It was of good quality, evidently an expensive one. Then, stooping down, he lifted a little bottle of spirit gum, a false

moustache. There were cloaks and costumes, the motley of a jester and a Harlequin outfit. At the bottom of the box were two plumed hats and an ostrich feather fan.

"Costumes for charades!" said the disappointed Bragg.

Dimm said: "This looks to me to be very suspicious. These disguises are——"

"Did you ever see a crook dressed as a Mephistopheles?" asked Bragg dryly. He dropped the coat he was holding and closed the lid.

McIver had gone across to the window and was staring over the lawn. The sun was high in the sky and the mountain of verdure was gaily green.

Dimm moved around uncomfortably. He had put the gun back into his pocket, but there was a tense wariness about him still. This great dark room with its oak panelling and its grotesque carvings did not appeal to him. He moved around uncomfortably, opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and closed it.

There was the slightest of sounds from the corridor.

McIver's hand went to his pocket, and the big inspector could stand it no longer.

"Where are we?" he asked squeakily.

The door opened and someone came into the room. They saw him start with surprise and his jaw fall.

"Good heavens!" said Selwyn St. David.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

CINNAFORD SOUGHT THE NEAREST CHAIR AND SAT DOWN IN IT. THEN he stared at them weakly.

"Where on earth did you come from?" And then his eyes saw the opening in the wall. "Good lord!"

"You were not aware of this passage, sir?" McIver spoke sharply. Cinnaford shook his head.

"Aware of it?" he squeaked. "I would think not. Where does it lead to?"

"We came from Grey Lodge."

The young man started. "Grey Lodge? You mean that secret chamber place that Mr. Spicer was so interested in led you here? Who managed to find the entrance?"

"Mr. Spicer brought a man in."

"Oh yes, of course. I'd forgotten that. A little fellow who looked like a jockey. I saw him arriving. He seemed a queer sort of fellow for a job like that."

"He was a friend of Kelman's."

"Old Mark has some queer pals."

McIver nodded. "Now, sir, why did you leave Grey Lodge and return here?"

Cinnaford started. "Why do you ask that?" Then: "I suppose you have your reasons. Actually I wasn't feeling too good and I had a thundering headache and I couldn't see it getting any better unless I came away and took something."

The inspector nodded. "We found Ferguson."

"Good man! Where did you pick him up?"

"In the passage," said McIver softly. "He's dead!"

"What?" There was horror in the young man's eyes. "Ferguson dead? He wasn't murdered?"

"He had been stabbed in the back!"

Cinnaford swallowed hard.

"My heavens! This is hideous, McIver. Can't you do something to stop these killings? Can't you get your hands on this maniac?"

McIver nodded. "We'll have this case in hand in a very short time."

"I hope so," Cinnaford groaned. "You've got two murders on your hands now." He hesitated for a second. "To tell you the truth, this upsets my own theory in the matter."

"Why is that?"

"I thought that Ferguson had murdered Margaret Elter."

McIver smiled crookedly. "So did I at one time." And then he laughed. "It was you that Bragg saw in the stables the other day? The day you dropped the stop-watch?"

Cinnaford looked crestfallen.

"Yes, it was. I'd been doing a little detective work on my own, and I thought Ferguson was playing a double game. I meant to have a look through his room, and I was on the point of going upstairs when I heard someone there."

"Me!" said Bragg practically.

"Was it you? I couldn't be sure. Anyway, I took to my heels. It might have been Ferguson himself, and I wouldn't have had a very good excuse for having been found there."

"I suppose not." McIver smiled a little.

Cinnaford looked at Bragg. "Did you find out anything?"

McIver answered for him. "We learned that Ferguson had had a love affair in his youth."

"A love affair? I don't see that that explains very much."

"On the contrary, it explains a great deal. For if Ferguson had never known Dora Baker, then he would never have been killed."

"Who was Dora Baker?" Cinnaford was puzzled.

"Margaret Elter's mother."

Bragg stared. "I must say you keep a lot to yourself, McIver. Where did you learn that?"

"This morning," the inspector said. "I suspected it for a time, but I learned definitely then." And then he chuckled. "Grey Face went to a lot of trouble to prevent us learning that little fact." He shrugged his shoulders.

"We'd better go back. No—we won't use the tunnel. We'll make better time by the road."

They returned to Grey Lodge, and here they found the Chief Constable had arrived. The dapper major had been with Spicer and it was plain to see that he was disturbed at the dual crime.

"A terrible business, McIver; what do you make of it?"

"In my opinion," said Chief Inspector Dimm, who was also present, "these murders are the work of a maniac. Grey Face is mad. There is no point and no method in them. When I was investigating the Morley sack murder I found a similar situation. It wouldn't do to mention it to everyone, but——"

Major Orde said briefly: "Let's get down to this business, Inspector, and forget other murders. What about this one?"

But Dimm could make no practical comment here.

The body of Ferguson had been removed and the Inspector from the Berkshire headquarters could give a little information. "He had been stabbed twice," he said. "The knife was left in the wound on the second occasion. You will find it in the library, and I have a constable there on guard."

They adjourned to the library. There was more than the knife on the little table. Ferguson's pockets had been turned out and a miscellaneous collection lay before their eyes. There was a large clasp-knife, a wallet containing twenty-seven pounds in notes, a chauffeur's licence and some old letters. At one side was an ugly looking wrench, and McIver lifted this up and examined it.

"What is that for?" asked the inspector.

It was taped with insulating tape and McIver weighed it in his hand. "Ferguson carried it around with him for his protection, I suppose. It is more deadly than a cosh. It would give a man a nasty knock."

He picked up the knife which was lying on a sheet of white paper, held it gingerly between finger and thumb. It was straight-bladed and sharp. The blade was some six inches long and the handle was curiously worked in bone.

"I've never seen a knife just like that before," Bragg remarked. "It's like a butcher's knife, isn't it?"

"It is a butcher's knife." McIver was positive. "What they call a flesher's knife in Scotland. Rather an old-fashioned type I would say, and very elaborate. The blade is razor sharp. It would not take a very strong blow with this to kill a man."

Bragg looked interested. "Did Grey Face kill him? If he did, why did he use a knife? That's a new weapon for him."

McIver nodded. "A gun would have made too much noise. Ferguson was killed there where we found him; what could do the job more silently than that little sticker?"

He went out and along to the library, where Spicer and Kelman were fussing at the delay. Spicer rose to his feet when he came into the room.

"What's all this about, McIver? Mark tells me that Ferguson is dead."

"That is true." The detective sat down. "I'll have to have a statement from you, Mr. Spicer. Ferguson was killed in your house."

Mr. Spicer's statement was lurid, pointed and descriptive. When he had finished he slapped his hand down on his knee. "I'm clearing out of here, McIver, just as soon as I can arrange to go elsewhere! Marion is being married in a few days' time and I'm going to put up at my club. I've had enough excitement to last me for the rest of my life."

"When is the wedding to take place?"

Spicer shook his head gloomily. "I'm not sure. Selwyn is going to see the bishop today some time. It will be a quiet wedding, of course. If it had been left to me I would have done the thing in style, but the girl thinks differently."

McIver nodded.

Mark Kelman had not spoken at all. Now he said: "When can we get away from here, McIver?"

"Were you in a hurry?"

Kelman's face darkened. "Yes, I was." His features were a little defiant. "I have an engagement for this afternoon. A business engagement."

"Your friend Muller?" McIver gave him smile for smile. "I met him the other night. An extraordinary fellow. I took a rubber truncheon away from him and I think he resented it very much."

Kelman was a little taken aback.

"Muller is all right. A bit of a rough diamond, of course, but you can't help that."

"Decidedly a rough diamond," said the inspector. He looked at his watch. "Well, I won't detain you any longer. You will have to appear at the inquest, of course."

"Naturally," said Kelman. He nodded shortly and went out.

Spicer said sorrowfully: "Something has come over Mark recently. He used to be the cheeriest man you'd meet in a day's march. Now it's a job to get a word out of him. Maybe it's no wonder! If I'm here much longer I'll be as bad."

McIver chuckled.

"Kelman isn't the worrying sort. At least he doesn't impress me like that. But I suppose all this waste of time must annoy so busy a man. He has a lot of irons in the fire. What exactly does he do?"

"He's an agent of some sort," Mr. Spicer said. "And let me tell you this, he's a smart business man. There isn't a bank in the country that he hasn't had dealings with."

"That is interesting."

"Extraordinary fellow," said Spicer. "No—he doesn't do anything on the Exchange. He told me once that the man who played the Exchange was like the man who played horses. I'm inclined to think he was correct."

McIver brought the conversation round to another topic.

"You'll be a lonely man, Mr. Spicer, when your daughter marries Cinnaford."

"You've said it." He had touched the American where he was touchiest. "You'd think that a man who'd made as much cash as I have, McIver, wouldn't have time for sentiment, but I guess I'm the most sentimental millionaire in England today. I'm going to miss that little girl just as much as I missed her mother."

"I can believe that," McIver said quietly.

"We were only married for seven years," Spicer said slowly, "but those were the seven happiest years of my life. Yes, sir! I'm going to miss Marion. But I'll possibly take over Grey Lodge once the police get this thing cleaned up. I'll be close enough to Cinnaford Chase and to my girl. Besides, I'll be able to give Selwyn a hand with the running of things. Selwyn's a good fellow but he has no head for business."

McIver was surprised, and said so.

The old man chuckled.

"I'll tell you something that nobody else knows, McIver. Selwyn isn't worth a bean. There was no money along with this title of his. All he got was a few thousand acres encumbered with debt, and the boy was nearly driven mad with money worry until I took things in hand."

"You cleared it?"

"Of course! Couldn't have people say he was marrying Marion for her money. I took over his encumbrances. When they get married I'm going to settle half a million on them."

"My heavens!" said McIver.

Spicer chuckled.

"I've made a hundred and ten million dollars, inspector. I've given money away all my life, and I've got darn nearly as much now as I had when I started giving. Twenty million pounds! That's a lot of money. Some day they'll have what's left of it."

A uniformed sergeant tapped at the door.

"Inspector Dimm's compliments, sir, but will you come to the hall? There's a man downstairs to see you."

"To see me?" McIver asked.

"Yes, sir. He has a message of some sort."

"You'll excuse me, sir?" He rose and went downstairs and in the hallway met Chief Inspector Dimm.

"Voyce is here, McIver, with a message for you." The big inspector was inclined to be huffy. "You've been keeping a lot of information dark, Inspector. I don't know that I approve of it."

The rebuke was justified and McIver smiled. It was held against him that he invariably kept silent with regard to his cases until the very last moment. In clubs and grill-rooms where Scotland Yard men forgathered, little knots of them met to discuss this secrecy.

Inspector Dimm, who owed so very much to a secretive and ancient inspector of detectives, was invariably one of the loudest voices among these men, for Dimm hated a secret unless it was his particular secret, when he was hushed and dignified.

Just now he was neither.

"I've been reading your reports and I've been listening to Bragg, and I'm very certain that not half the things he hints about come into them."

"There are certain things that one cannot commit to paper," said McIver smugly. He went into the ante-room and saw Voyce.

The little man rose to greet him. "I hope I haven't butted in on something important, sir, but a policeman on a motor-cycle brought this letter for you." He produced it from his pocket.

"He didn't want to leave it at first and I told him I'd put it in the safe and he changed his mind."

McIver turned the envelope over. It was of a colour and texture that were familiar to him. He looked up.

"What caused you to bring it up here?"

Voyce shifted his position.

"Well, sir. Haycock was in just after the constable left and he told me that you were up here. I got to thinking that perhaps it was important you should get this letter. You remember you kept asking yesterday if any messages had arrived for you?"

"Yes."

"I mentioned it to Martha and she sent me up with it."

McIver nodded. "Thank you, Voyce. I'll get you a lift back." He went along and found the sergeant. "Take Voyce back in the police car, Bragg."

Then he inserted his fingers in the flap and tore open the envelope. There were two enclosures. The first that he opened out was type-written on stiff, blue paper.

Wandsworth Prison.

*Inspector W. McIver,
New Scotland Yard.
Sir,*

Joseph Guildler, awaiting sentence on a drug-trafficking charge, has made a formal application through Major Bentham to have an interview with you. Guildler has handed me a letter which I am enclosing herewith. Will you let me know your opinion on this?

I am,

Yours truly,

L. A. Appin.

He unfolded the second enclosure.

*Inspector W. McIver.
Dear Sir,*

I have been thinking over what you told me the other day. I am due to come up on Friday next, and if I make a statement can you do something for me? I will tell you about the man I saw on the Cinnaford Road the night that the Elter girl was murdered. Hoping to hear from you.

Joseph Guildler.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

FOR A LONG MOMENT MCIVER COULD ONLY STARE AT THE NOTE AND then the wording began to blur before his eyes.

Guilder was going to squeal !

He felt a queer surge of elation in his heart. What could Guilder have to tell ? Who was this man that he had seen on the Cinnaford road on the night that Margaret Elter had been murdered ? And then he remembered what Guilder had said. That he had once seen Grey Face !

This, then, had been the occasion !

He stuffed the letter into his pocket and went along to the telephone. In a few moments he had put through his call and had asked for Superintendent Flinders.

Flinders was a scholarly man who spent most of his time at a scarred desk signing his initials on different sizes and shapes of forms that were thrust at him by harassed clerks. Sometimes he varied the form of employment and used the telephone.

McIver made his whereabouts known.

"I have had a letter from the warden of Wandsworth Prison," he said, "enclosing a message from Guilder, whom I arrested several days ago. Guilder mentioned in an interview at which Chief Inspector Dimm and myself were present that he had some information concerning Grey Face."

"Yes," said Flinders, interested.

"I want him brought to Scotland Yard for an interview," McIver said. "I will drive down this afternoon. Can you arrange to have Guilder there for me ?"

"I'll arrange it," Flinders said. He shook an admiring head. "Do you think that you could have cut it any neater ? In another five minutes I'd have gone for lunch."

"Let us hope that you get it," said McIver and hung up.

Dimm came in, an interested listener.

"That was Guilder you were talking about ? What is he going to squeak about ?"

"Grey Face !"

Chief Inspector Dimm raised his eyebrows. "Grey Face ? Then if you don't object I will come back to Scotland Yard with you."

"I have no objection," McIver said shortly. "Nor, I fancy, will Guilder. I'll leave it to you to make arrangements for transport, then."

Dimm, whatever were his faults, was a good arranger of anything that worked to his advantage or even to his comfort.

"I'll attend to that."

McIver went back to the library. Spicer had gone and the room was empty. He sat down in front of the fire and stared into the flames.

Here was a piece of unexpected luck ! Guilder's statement might hold much or little, but it would be at least one more link in the chain of accumulative evidence that he was forging. Other links had to be added, but very soon now the case would be completed.

Someone was coming along the hallway now. He half turned and saw that it was Marion Campbell. She saw him, stopped, and came into the room.

"Good morning, Inspector. Daddy was telling me about poor Ferguson."

He did not speak.

She said: "It's so horrible that I can't bear to think of it. Who is responsible for these terrible murders? Is he a madman?" There was a tremor in her voice. The girl was perilously near to breaking-point.

McIver drew a chair in towards the fire.

"I think you should sit down," he said kindly.

"Thank you. I suppose I am silly, but I think that my nerves are upset. I'm fighting to keep a grip of myself all the time now. Ever since last night . . .!" She gave a shudder. "I'll never forget that man as long as I live. I can see his arms stretching out for me yet!"

He laughed softly.

"I wouldn't think any more about that, Miss Campbell. After all, you are going to have a trying time for a few days—and after that . . .!" He smiled wryly. "Well, the Lady of Cinnaford should have no horrible memories."

She looked up at him.

"I wonder if you really mean that or if you are just trying to be nice to me?"

"I've been called a lot of things," said McIver dryly, "but never nice. No—I'm a practical man, Miss Campbell. You may be required to give evidence, and I don't want you to be upset about that, because any evidence you will be called on to give will be purely formal."

She said: "You think that you will catch this man—this brute?"

"I'm very sure of it." He looked into her face. Beyond the smile he saw weariness and dread; a vague and nameless tremor as though there were thoughts in her mind that she could never dare to put into words.

He felt an odd sorrow for her; ever since he had seen this girl he had felt a sense of familiarity in her presence and an odd desire to confide in her. Now he checked this impulse as it rose again.

She said suddenly: "Mr. McIver—you don't know how I feel about this. I can't tell you! I can't explain it, but I've got a fear in my soul today that I've never known in all my life. But every time that——"

She stopped abruptly. "That's a car! Who is it?"

It was Bragg returning.

McIver came back from the window, and as he turned round he saw the door open and Spicer came in.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, Marion. Selwyn called up to say that he's driving to Winchester to see some clerical friend there. The bishop is in the north just now attending some conference."

She nodded. "Thanks, Daddy. Is he coming over later?"

Spicer ruffled his hair. "I didn't ask him. Surely you can spend

a day with your old father?" He winked at McIver. "What do you think, Inspector?"

McIver laughed shortly. "I haven't an opinion, sir!" He excused himself and went out. When he got to the lower hall he saw Bragg smoking cigarettes in the doorway, in defiance of regulation and custom.

"What did it say?"

McIver frowned. "What did what say? You're the least explicit man I ever met."

"The letter Voyce brought. It must have had some bearing on the case when they sent it by a police cyclist. Dimm was green. Voyce said he'd have opened it if he had been prepared to hand it over. That man has cheek enough to spare."

"I've met men like that," said McIver.

Bragg sniffed. "If you're referring to me, you don't register! When I'm on a case nothing stops me. I'd open the Commissioner's mail, but I'd do it in a gentlemanly manner. Dimm's different. The man's a lout! I don't want to knock him, but if every man had his deserts Dimm would be picking oakum."

McIver sniffed.

"Dimm isn't the only one. But I suppose I'd better tell you. Guilder has written to me to say he wants to make a statement."

"About Grey Face?"

"Yes. You remember that he let slip something about him on the day he was arrested. I tried to get him to open up, but not a word would he speak. Well, he's changed his mind. Perhaps he's read about the Grey Face murders in the papers. Perhaps he thinks he'll get a year knocked off his sentence."

"Guilder is the sort of crook who always squeaks," said the knowledgeable Bragg. "He's lived in comfort for too long a time to be pleased with skilly and weak tea. Have you got a cigarette?"

He took one, borrowed a match and lit it.

"I can't say I care much for your brand, McIver."

"Mr. McIver," said the inspector, "or Inspector McIver. Even 'sir' wouldn't be out of place. If I can say it to Dimm and keep my face straight, you can try it on me."

Bragg sneered. "All this 'sirring' and what not makes me sick. In these democratic days you'd think they'd cut all that sort of stuff out—but no! It gets worse. Discipline—pah!"

"The last time I heard you discuss discipline," said McIver deliberately, "was this morning. You pulled young Haycock up for not calling you Sergeant."

"That was different. Haycock's a boy. Besides, it's good for him."

"One of the things I like most about you is that you are always consistent. Let us go back to the 'Grey Man' and have some lunch."

Dimm had made his arrangements with the Chief Constable, and a saloon car with a police chauffeur was waiting for them when the meal was finished.

Dimm was important. A constable carried out a suitcase, a small

case and the various paraphernalia without which that great man never travelled. This was piled in the rear of the car, and Dimm monopolized the roomy front seat.

Guilder, they found, was on his way to Scotland Yard when they arrived. McIver went to his room. There was a little pile of unopened correspondence in the wire basket and he glanced through this.

"Here's something, Bragg, a letter from the Ormsby Police. You remember that man sent to Ormsby?"

"Chap who was knocked down?"

"Yes. He's made a statement to the local police. He didn't see this car until it was right on top of him, but he's sure it was a Bentley."

"That's a big help," said Bragg.

A uniformed constable tapped at the door and looked in. "Guilder is here, sir—in Chief Inspector Dimm's room."

McIver went along the corridor.

Dimm sat in his own chair, wearing a grim smile. Guilder sat across from him, and his face was whiter and more finely drawn. The joviality and good fellowship had gone from him, and his eyes were hunted. He looked up when McIver came in, and that cold-eyed man nodded.

"Well, Guilder, I'm here! I hope you've got something to say, for you've brought us seventy miles to hear this squeak."

Guilder swallowed.

"I hope you'll think it worth while, Inspector." He hesitated a little. "It isn't much, but it's all I know. Anyway—if it helps maybe you'll do something for me!"

"I'm making no promises."

"You understand the position," said Dimm grandly. "Scotland Yard makes no promise. Any statement that you make, you make of your own free will, and with no hope of any reward such as diminution of sentence. If Inspector McIver tries to secure such a diminution of sentence, I shall oppose it. And, if I say it myself, I am not without influence."

McIver said shortly:

"Nothing like that is proposed. What have you to say, Guilder? Remember, I am offering nothing, but if your information is valuable, I will remember this when I go into the box."

"That's good enough for me," Guilder said. He thought for a moment and then: "Maybe you'll wonder why I'm making a squeak at all. Well, I've been thinking over all that you said, and I've done a little private figuring. I'm fifty-five just now, and if they stick me away for five years I'm a dead man. I reckon I'll get a five, if you tell all you know, and at my time of life a year makes a big difference. I've got everything to gain and I've nothing to lose so I'll tell you all that I know."

McIver nodded. This was a form of logic that he understood. The man leaned forward earnestly.

"All right. You know my line, so I don't need to talk about that. I'd been following the circuit that I usually take. You know that too, I guess, but I'm not going to tie the rope any tighter about my own

neck. I got into Cinnaford in the late afternoon and I put up at the 'Grey Man'. I'd called at the place several times and Joyce knew me as Woodbridge, and took me for a commercial." He looked at McIver, saw the light of interest in the man's eyes.

"I meant to put up for the night there at first and then I changed my mind. I had to meet a certain party at Winchester and I thought I'd have a meal and a rest at the 'Grey Man' and then push right through. Well, that was what I did do. I had dinner at the 'Grey Man' along with a pretty American girl—a Miss Elter!"

"You know what happened to Margaret Elter?"

"Yes," the man said. "That's one of the things that induced me to talk. I don't want to be mixed up in any murder. Well, after dinner I drove away. It was a pretty dark night, and like a damned fool I didn't look in the back of my car when I left the 'Grey Man'." Here he hesitated.

"I usually left that case of mine where I could see it. Well, on this night I carried it out to the car—and just as I was about to get inside Joyce called my attention to my headlights. One of the black-out masks had slipped. I put this case down to adjust it and then drove away and left it there, at the corner of the stables. I was a good two miles away when I remembered it, and I turned back at once. I guess you'll know how I felt, Inspector."

"If it was the case I saw, I guess I do," said McIver.

Guilder nodded. "I came back for it, and in the darkness I made two wrong turnings. Anyway, I was some time in finding the road—and then I saw this man in the beam of the headlights."

"Go on!"

Dimm was leaning forward, his head cocked on one side like that of an enquiring devil.

Guilder looked from one to the other.

"Well, at first I couldn't make him out. I had dimmers on, but with it being a dark road, I was using parking lights as well, and I got a good enough view of him. At first I thought he was winding a scarf round his neck. Then when I got closer I saw that it was a silk stocking."

"Grey Face!"

Dimm was half on his feet. "Go on! Did you recognize him? Would you recognize him again?"

"He was a tall man," said Guilder slowly, "*and he wore a beard!*"

"Good lord!" said the pious Bragg.

Dimm looked at him significantly. "A beard? Inspector, you will recollect that I had a theory earlier on that——"

"What else did you see?"

Guilder shook his head.

"Nothing else. I stopped to ask him if I was right for Cinnaford and he vanished. I was puzzled and began to drive away. And then I remembered the stocking, and it occurred to me that he had been drawing it from over his head when I turned the corner. There was a high wind blowing and I guess he didn't hear the car. Anyway, I was

sure he was Grey Face—and I was frightened. I went back to Cinna-ford and I picked up my case without anyone being any the wiser. Next day you picked me up, and I wouldn't have said anything about it then, only I was riled and I wanted to talk big."

"When did you learn about the Elter murder?"

"When I went to Wandsworth. I read about the murder in the papers and I knew then that the man I had seen was Grey Face."

There was a little silence.

Guilder looked from one to the other. "Well—what does my evidence rate?"

McIver got to his feet.

"You saw Grey Face once—would you recognize him if you saw him again?"

Guilder hesitated. "I—I'd have a try at it."

"Then you'll come down to Cinnaford with me," said McIver. "Chief Inspector Dimm will agree with my decision, I think?"

Dimm's little eyes glinted.

"Yes," he said evenly. "I agree."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"DIMM MEANS TO BE IN AT THE DEATH," SAID BRAGG SNEERINGLY. HE stood by the window and peered down over the Embankment.

There was a pall of grey mist settling over the river and billowing upwards and over the city. In another hour the darkness of night would have settled over them and London would be given over to a corps of grim, lynx-eyed men.

McIver nodded.

"He'll be there!" he said significantly.

The little detective scowled. "Do you think Guilder is on the level?"

"I don't know him at all."

Bragg was dubious.

"I've seen his kind before. He sees that he's going to get a 'five' and he figures that if he can lead us up the garden path he may get something knocked off. He has everything to gain and nothing to lose."

There was a step in the corridor and a uniformed sergeant came to the door.

"A cable for Inspector McIver," he said. He carried the envelope in his hand. "Superintendent Flinders said that you were in the building, sir, otherwise I'd have despatched it."

McIver took it, read it through, and Bragg saw his eyes glint.

"What is it?"

The inspector pushed the paper across the desk. "Read it for yourself. I wouldn't let Dimm know about it yet. It never does any harm to have something up your sleeve."

Bragg winked one eye. "Trust me."

The cablegram had been despatched from New York.

Inspector McIver Stop Scotland Yard Stop London Stop Baker investigated Stop One daughter known as Margaret Baker or Elter Stop Elter working for Cameron Agency Stop Good character married Mark Sherman New York July 1933 Stop Sherman no police record but suspect in two bank holdups Stop Elter separated June 1934 and Sherman left city Stop Since then no trace Stop Cameron gives Elter OK Stop

Edward J. Parnay Lieutenant

New York Police Department.

Bragg whistled aloud.

"Lord love a duck! Margaret Elter! You were correct then about her being Dora Baker's daughter. How did you find out?"

"Somerset House. I found out that Dora Baker, or Wilson, had had a daughter, and concluded that this girl had changed her name to Elter for some reason or another. Evidently I was correct." McIver looked back at the cable. "You'll notice that Parnay insists twice on Elter's character."

Bragg nodded. "These American detectives are hot stuff. If they checked her and found her O.K. you can bet that she was." His eyes were puzzled. "Who is this Sherman?"

"Mark Sherman?" McIver rubbed his thin, strong fingers over his chin. "I've got an idea, but it's going to remain an idea."

"Meaning you won't tell me," said Bragg bitterly. "There's gratitude if you like! I'm with you in this business thick and thin. I take the rough with the smooth, and when it comes to a showdown, what do I get out of it?"

"You have my sympathy," said McIver. "And I tell you what I'll do. I'll let you put the handcuffs on Grey Face! Could anyone ask for more?"

Bragg's eyes narrowed. "You seem pretty sure you can put your hand on Grey Face."

"I could put my hand on him."

Bragg stared. "You mean that you know him?"

"I've known who Grey Face was since this morning." McIver's face was expressionless. "But knowing and proving are two different things."

"Good lord!" Bragg mopped his forehead. "You're a cool card, McIver. If that man kills again——"

McIver said bluntly: "I'm having him watched."

Suddenly he got to his feet and went silently to the door. With one quick wrench he threw it open and the man who was there straightened up sheepishly.

"I thought I heard you!" said McIver coldly.

Chief Inspector Dimm's eyes were cold. "I dropped a cigarette. I was bending to pick it up." He held out his hand.

Sure enough there was a cigarette between his two fingers.

McIver said abruptly: "I don't suppose you overheard anything that I was saying to Bragg?"

"Confound you, what are you suggesting?" The big man's ruddy cheeks grew purple. "You're a clever man, McIver. Much too clever for your shoes. One of these days you'll find that out!"

He stalked away in a rage.

Bragg shook an admiring head. "He never loses hope, does he? He was listening, of course."

McIver nodded. "He was listening all right. I wonder just how much he heard?"

"It must gall a man like that to think how much credit we are going to get," said Bragg confidentially.

McIver chuckled. "You'd better get in touch with Major Orde and tell him that we are bringing a valuable witness down to Cinnaford. Tell him that we will be at Grey Lodge before seven and that I want Spicer, Kelman, Lord Cinnaford and Spicer's butler present."

"Spicer's butler? Joseph?"

McIver nodded. "Joseph. You have four tall men. I'm going to try a little game with Guilder." He smiled amusedly. "Tell Orde I'll want a dozen policemen at the house."

"You can leave it to me," said Bragg. He went out and McIver sat in silence. The case was drawing to an end. He rose to his feet and went down to where Superintendent Flinders sat, a melancholy man with a lean, hatchet face.

"Glad to see you, McIver. By the way, you're for the carpet one of these days."

McIver was interested.

Flinders nodded. "You ought to get at least five years."

The inspector understood. "Chief Inspector Dimm?"

"A twelve-page report," said Flinders in a hushed voice. "It's made out in triplicate, and the Commissioner has a copy." He shook his head. "Dimm should have been a politician. He has all the flair for it. I wouldn't give a tinker's curse for your chance of holding down your job. According to Dimm, you are guilty of insubordination, disrespect, suppression of evidence, insulting behaviour, ignorance, perversity and ordinary downright incompetence."

McIver chuckled. "What a man! It's a good job that Scotland Yard isn't staffed with sergeant-majors from the Guards!" He turned his attention to something else.

Flinders listened and considered.

"It's irregular, of course, but it's being done. You'll be responsible, of course, for the safety of the prisoner."

"Naturally," said McIver grimly, and then he spoke softly for the next few moments and Flinders listened, astonished.

"It's a long time since I heard anything like it," he said. "I'll do what you suggest, Inspector."

When the younger man had gone he sat for a few moments in studied silence and then reached for the telephone.

Half an hour later a large black tourer moved out of New Scotland Yard. In front sat two armed policemen, and in the rear Chief Inspector Dimm and McIver, with Guilder sandwiched between them.

Guilder was excited and a little pale. There was a queer sense of nervousness about the man, and it was obvious from his manner that the escort provided to ensure his safety had only increased his misgivings.

As they left, McIver gave a final word.

"You will remember, Guilder, that if you make any attempt to escape, you will most certainly be caught again."

The man shook his head. "You needn't worry about that, sir. I'm not thinking of escaping."

They drove away and Dimm, who was sitting in silence, said suddenly: "Which route are we taking?"

McIver chuckled. "Gale has his orders from Superintendent Flinders."

A moment or two passed.

Dimm was puzzled. Twice he peered out into the darkening streets, and then in a few moments more the car drew into Waterloo.

"Why are we here?" Dimm asked sharply. "What does this mean?"

McIver said briefly: "An elementary precaution. We are not travelling by car—we are going by train to Basingstoke, and Major Orde has arranged that a police car will pick us up there."

Dimm was silent.

"Whose idea was this?" he finally asked.

"Mine." McIver watched him closely. "A Yard car is already on the way to Cinnaford. It contains five armed men. I will be interested to hear from them when we arrive."

The chief inspector bit his lips.

"Another of your confounded mysteries, McIver? I've told you before that you are too fond of the theatrical."

The man was angry. His lips were twitching with passion. A station policeman met them and escorted them to the train, which was already at the platform.

"It's the Southampton express," he said, "but she stops at Basingstoke. You have a special compartment along here."

There was a first class compartment reserved for them, and the man unlocked the door, watched them get inside, and handed McIver the key.

Dimm said suddenly: "Where is Bragg?"

"In charge of the other party."

In a few moments more the train pulled out of the darkened station and they settled down for the journey. Guilder sat with his head on his chest, and it was obvious that the man was thinking. Finally he said: "You seem to be going to a lot of trouble with me, Inspector."

"We are."

The man's nerves were crumbling. "I'm beginning to wish I'd just made a signed statement, sir. I'm not too keen on this. I've got a creepy sort of feeling somehow." He looked up. "This Grey Face is a pretty dangerous customer."

"That's right," said McIver mirthlessly.

The man subsided, and the moments passed. It was half an hour later that he said abruptly:

"Who's that?"

McIver straightened up. "Who is who?"

Guilder was pointing to the corridor. "That man has passed here several times. I've got an idea he's watching us."

The inspector got to his feet. "Watch this man carefully." He went out into the darkened corridor in time to hear a compartment door slide shut ahead of him. He hesitated a moment and then walked up the corridor.

There were four women in the first compartment, in the second and third a handful of naval and army officers, a big man in the garb of a clergyman and a younger man with a small fair moustache.

He went back to the compartment.

"See anyone you know?" Dimm's voice was sarcastic.

"No." He sat down, worried. If Grey Face knew that he had changed his plans, then Grey Face knew too much! His eyes went to Guilder again and he saw that the man was nervous and unhappy. That for some unaccountable reason he was terrified.

Dimm sat beside him like a ponderous Buddha, his vast white hands clasped over his stomach.

In an hour they were at Basingstoke and had descended to the darkened platform, and here two policemen were awaiting their arrival.

"We have two cars outside, sir," a sergeant said, "and we have been instructed to place ourselves under your orders."

"Dimm and I will drive with Guilder," said McIver.

"Take him to the car." He was still uneasy. Without concrete reason, apprehension was his mood.

The men went away, and he followed behind them. He was outside the station superintending the filling of the cars when he had a sudden inspiration. "Wait here for a moment; I'll be back." He went into the station.

The passengers from the train had alighted and were making their way to the various exits. He went quickly up the platform and then stopped.

The big figure of the clergyman was standing ahead of him engaged in earnest conversation with someone. McIver moved closer and saw that the other was the young man with the fair moustache. For a second he hesitated and then walked straight across to the cleric.

"Pardon me. Haven't I met you before?"

The clergyman did not answer. He turned a surprised face towards him.

The young man said slowly: "Perhaps you have, but I don't recollect it. Who are you?"

"Inspector McIver of Scotland Yard."

There was a little silence.

"Bless my soul!" the clergyman said. He had a deep, bass and rather pleasant voice.

The other shook his head and laughed.

"I don't think I come into your scope, Inspector. I'm a peace-loving man and I travel in electric fittings."

The inspector nodded. He had seen the gold tooth in a rather prominent mouth, and it touched no chord in his memory. "I'm sorry," he said briefly.

He went back to the car. "Drive on."

"Well?" said the impatient Dimm. "Did you discover what you were after?" It was difficult not to notice the sneer in his voice.

McIver kept his temper.

They drove away. Ten minutes had passed before something seemed to click in his brain. A recollection of that nasal high-toned voice came to him, and in an instant he knew his man.

Emil Muller!

And if Muller had been the younger man, Kelman was very certainly the priest!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

MCIVER HAD NOT LEFT THE STATION BEFORE MULLER SAID: "THAT WAS a near thing. That fellow has eyes in his head like a hawk!"

Kelman nodded.

"He must have seen us in the train. He was suspicious, of course. I guess most cops are suspicious."

"Don't I know it!" Muller breathed thinly. He looked at his watch. "Sperry is late! I wonder what can have happened?"

"Sperry will be all right. He didn't expect this change in our plans, but he's a safe driver."

"Say, did you see that fellow Guilder? He's got the fear of death in him! I wonder what he thinks he'll get out of this?"

"I could guess," said Kelman briefly. He turned on his heel. "We'd better get out of here in case McIver takes it into his head to come back. I'll give him this much credit—he's smart."

They made their way outside and in a few moments a car came towards them and a thickset man got out. He would have walked into the station, but Kelman said: "Here we are, Sperry."

Sperry turned and came across.

"Say, I've been pushed! Got a flat too, just outside Basingstoke. And I had to change it."

They got into the car and drove away. Sperry, who knew his job, drove like a fiend, and yet with a delicacy of touch and handling which guided the big car over difficult roads.

They were approaching Cinnaford when he leaned back and said: "There's another car coming up behind us."

Kelman looked back.

The man was right. Far behind were two pinpoints of light and these were settling on their tail. For a moment or two he considered and then: "It must have come up from the main road. You'd better lose them at Mallin's Lane."

There was a narrow lane opening up ahead. Sperry brought the big car into it, switched out the lights and waited. Five minutes passed and a car sped past in the darkness.

Sperry opened the window and cocked a meditative ear. "That's an Alvis or I'm a Dutchman."

Muller chuckled. "You can tell 'em by the sound, Sperry?"

The other nodded. "If you had worked in a public garage for the last twenty years you could tell any car you heard by the sound of its engine. Give me ten guesses and I'll be right nine times in my guess."

After a moment they backed out and drove slowly to Friar's Hall. Kelman got out and said: "You'll wait here for tonight, Sperry. Just now—go with Muller."

"Yes, sir."

Kelman went inside. Muller cut round towards the back of the house and walked straight into the darkness of the wood. In a moment or two Sperry's eyes were accustomed to the gloom, and he could see that the younger man was following a path. For five minutes he walked in silence and then he stopped. "We've got a fellow here who's been giving us some trouble," he said.

Sperry smiled in the gloom. "Kelman takes some chances."

Muller chuckled. "He gets away with them. And we shouldn't worry about that. He gets the money, doesn't he? He pays us plenty. I guess he can afford it at that."

He crossed the little clearing and felt in his pocket for a light. When he flashed it on, Sperry heard his intake of breath.

"What's wrong?"

"Somebody's been here!" Muller drew a gun from his pocket and then kicked the door open.

It crashed against the inner wall and then there was silence. For a moment he did not move and then, very cautiously, he played the torch round the cottage.

It was empty! Harper had gone.

He moved forward with an oath. There on the floor were the cords that had bound the man. He picked them up and examined the strong twine. It had been cut by a sharp knife. He turned his light on the dusty floor. There were various footprints here, his own and Kelman's among them.

Who had set Harper free?

This was a contingency for which he had not planned. Someone had obviously discovered the man. The police, probably!

He went back outside and examined the lock. It had been broken by a strong and heavy pressure; possibly by the use of some iron instrument, for the wood was splintered. He turned to Sperry. "We'd better get back. This is something we hadn't figured on!"

They went back to the house, but Kelman was gone. The woman servant who spoke to them could tell them that a police sergeant had called in the evening and had asked her to deliver a message to Mr. Kelman. She did not know what the message was, for it had been in a sealed envelope. She had taken it and had told him that Mr. Kelman should have it on his return. She had given it to him immediately and he had gone out again.

They went along to the library. There was no sign of any message here, but in the fireplace was a little flake of ash, and it was easy to suppose that this was the residue of the envelope.

Sperry, a silent man, waited until he spoke.

"It might be Grey Lodge. I've a mind to find out." He went across, lifted the 'phone and gave a number.

In a moment more he was speaking.

"May I speak to Mr. Kelman, please?"

"Who is calling?" Joseph's cautious voice came to his ears.

Muller hesitated. "A friend of Mr. Kelman's. I am calling from Friar's Hall and they told me that he might have gone to Grey Lodge."

"Very good, sir."

In a moment more he heard Kelman's voice.

"This is Muller, boss."

"What do you want?"

"Harper's gone!" said Muller briefly.

There was a second of silence, and then Kelman said: "That's bad. I didn't figure on anything like that. Who got him, do you think?"

"It may have been the police!"

"Well, you'd better keep your eyes open. I've got mine peeled."

Muller considered. "A party on?"

"That's right. A party that you wouldn't care to be at. It's like a cop's convention. All sizes and shapes. You'd better try to head him off."

He hung up, and turned round to see a lean man watching him curiously.

"Good evening, Kelman. This is the second time I've seen you tonight."

Kelman chuckled. "If you say it is—then it is, McIver."

"You were at Basingstoke a couple of hours ago," said the detective quietly.

The American shook his head. "You're wrong this time, McIver. I came straight from London by car."

"By your own car?"

The man hesitated for only a fraction of a second. "Yes."

"Then Cinnaford must have been lying when he said that he had been using it this afternoon."

"I have two cars," said Kelman briefly.

"Oh!" McIver nodded. "I'd never heard of the other one." He watched the other leave and then walked to the door. A big raw-boned man stood there lounging against the wall.

"Keep your eye on that man, Gale. If he leaves the house, let me know."

He went back to the library. Here was a crowded room, for it contained Dimm, Guilder, various members of the Berkshire Constabulary and Mr. Spicer, who was more than usually voluble.

"So far as I can see," he boomed, "this business is going to drive me mad. I don't get the idea of it at all. Who is this man, anyway?" He glanced at Guilder with venom, and that man paled.

McIver chuckled.

"Guilder is the one man who has seen Grey Face in person," he said slowly.

There was a little stir. Mr. Spicer's eyes grew colder and Major Orde looked more alert. The Chief Constable looked up. "When was this, Inspector?"

"On the night that Margaret Elter was killed!"

Spicer came slowly to his feet.

"You mean that?" he gasped.

Chief Inspector Dimm gave a sour laugh.

"McIver has some idea that Guilder can identify Grey Face," he informed. "Since Grey Face wore a beard when Guilder saw him I don't see that this farce can benefit anyone."

"A beard! Ferguson wore a beard!" Spicer was excited. "Good lord, man, do——"

There was a step at the door and they all turned.

Joseph came in. "Inspector McIver is wanted on the telephone."

McIver went out, and Chief Inspector Dimm complained loudly of junior officers with a taste for the theatrical. "Mark my words, sir," he said solemnly, "something is going to happen to upset that young man's apple-cart. As I said to Superintendent Philips, there is a time and place for these sort of games, and the time and place is not here. McIver has overstepped himself and he'll repent it or my name is not Dimm!"

"Rubbish!" said Spicer testily. "McIver is all right! A smart fellow. You could do with a lot more like him. What do you think, Major?"

Major Orde had his own comment to make. "We'll get this case settled up tonight. McIver has promised me that."

"Then what are we waiting for?" demanded Kelman sourly.

Spicer looked up angrily. "Where is Selwyn? Damn me, the boy was here half an hour ago!"

Major Orde glanced round him. "I rather fancy he is downstairs with Miss Campbell. They have one of my best men with them."

"I don't like it," said Spicer fretfully. He got to his feet. "I'll go along and see if I can find them." He was at the door when he met McIver coming back.

"You haven't seen Cinnaford, McIver?"

The inspector shook his head. "No," he said shortly. He looked straight across at Inspector Dimm. "You appeared to doubt my wisdom this evening, Inspector."

"I've doubted your wisdom for a long time," Dimm answered.

McIver smiled.

"You suggested that I was being theatrical when I rang the changes and sent Bragg ahead in a police car while we followed on by train."

"And I still think it," said the pompous Dimm. "It seems to me that——"

McIver interrupted him. "There will be some little delay then, gentlemen. The car containing Sergeant Bragg was held up at Keppel Keep. There was some shooting and two detectives were wounded."

There was a dead silence.

McIver added dryly: "The man who ambushed them got away."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

IT WAS HALF AN HOUR LATER BEFORE A POLICE CAR BROUGHT BRAGG and his two companions to Grey Lodge. The little sergeant was grimmer than McIver had ever seen him.

"We walked into it," he said frankly. "It was at one of those military road-blocks at Keppel Keep; one of those darkest bits of the road, because there was a wood on either side of it. Someone had shifted the red lamps that were hung on the barrier and put them on the opposite side of the road. Lennox was driving and he just managed to notice the barrier and swing round. We smashed it, side on."

McIver could only stare. Grey Face was a fast worker. This spoke of organization beyond the ordinary.

"I jumped out," Bragg continued. "At first I thought that it was a legitimate accident, and then someone opened fire on me. He fired six shots and both Kyne and Pennyfield were wounded."

"What did you do?"

The little man shrugged. "What could we do? I got into the wood on the opposite side of the road, but I didn't hear a thing. After that first volley he must have disappeared. I heard someone moving in the wood, but I soon lost touch with him. Anyway, a gamekeeper came up in a few moments. He'd heard the shooting and came out to investigate. I went with him and found a telephone."

"Our man was waiting for Guilder!" McIver said. "That fellow is clever. You'd almost think he could anticipate what we do! He's got me worried, Bragg! Have you had a meal?"

Bragg shook his head. "We will have to make arrangements for Frazer and Middleton to have something too. Frazer has a gash on his cheek, but he wouldn't go with the others to have it dressed."

"I'll speak to Mr. Spicer." The inspector went away. In a moment he was back. "Joseph will attend to you."

The three policemen went downstairs and McIver walked along the hall. He was passing a room door when he saw Cinnaford inside with Marion Campbell. A big, burly man was lounging uncomfortably in the hall, and he straightened as he saw the inspector. McIver stopped. "Who are you?"

"Detective-Constable Peel, sir."

"You have had your instructions, Peel?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are armed?"

The man took out a Browning. It was loaded. McIver could see the snub grey noses of the bullets. "Put it away. I don't suppose there is one chance in fifty that you will require to use it."

The girl had heard his voice. She looked up, waved a hand and said: "May I speak to you, Inspector?"

He went into the room. She looked smaller and more fragile and there was a paler and more delicate look about her than he had ever seen.

She smiled. "What a busy man you are, Mr. McIver! Selwyn was telling me that you were in London today."

McIver turned to Cinnaford. "How did you know that?"

Cinnaford stared. "Mark told me. I hope I didn't put my foot in it! Was it supposed to be a secret?"

The inspector smiled wryly. "Very few things that happen around Cinnaford are a secret. Yes, Miss Campbell, I've been a little busier than I usually am. Do you mind if I sit down with you both for a moment?"

"Please do!" she said.

Cinnaford nodded. "I'm glad you came in, McIver. I'd like to pop along and speak to Mark. You'll wait with Marion until I come back. She's feeling nervous tonight."

"That will be my one pleasure this day."

Cinnaford chuckled. "There you go, Marion. McIver is a courtier as well as a policeman. No, I won't detain you for very long."

When he had gone the girl said: "Who is that big man outside the door? Selwyn says he is a detective."

"Selwyn is correct."

She sat down and stared into the fire and he noticed that the colour was coming back to her cheeks. She was more her vivacious self now. After a moment or two she said quietly:

"Things are coming to a head, aren't they?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"And that detective man is watching me. No—don't evade my question, Mr. McIver. I've seen him several times looking at me. Besides, he remained there when Selwyn went out. You put him there, didn't you?"

"Yes." He made the admission with some reluctance. "You have had one bad fright, young lady, and I don't propose that you should have another."

She caught him by the arm. "You've been terribly sweet to me, Mr. McIver—and I can't think why."

McIver, who could have thought of a hundred reasons, could hardly have named one of them. "I'm only doing my duty," he said. "Grey Face has killed two people, Miss Campbell. There isn't a single reason why he should attack you, but so long as there is any danger I do not care that you should be exposed to it."

Spicer appeared suddenly in the doorway. "Here you are, dear! I hope you aren't being too lonely down here; why don't you go through and talk to Mrs. Poole for a while until McIver gets this over?"

"I'm not so lonely as that," she said, and the old man chuckled.

"I guess you feel like the rest of us; you want to get at the root of the business. When will you be ready, McIver?"

"I'm ready now." McIver rose to his feet.

Marion Campbell said: "May I come through? I'd like to be there—please!"

"I'd prefer you to remain here."

She said slowly: "I guess you don't know me, Mr. McIver. Even if it's dangerous—I want to be there."

He made up his mind. "If you really wish it."

They went up to the room. Major Orde was standing by the big fireplace, a little uneasy, just a little nervous. Kelman sat close to the door, and the big man was smiling phlegmatically. He was telling a story as they went in, and he laughed uproariously at the conclusion of it.

Chief Inspector Dimm sat beside the door, a superior smile on his superior face. It was evident that Dimm of all those present was least impressed. Cinnaford was sitting across from him, his pleasant, boyish features a little excited. He glanced up reassuringly at the girl as she came into the room and got up to let her sit down.

Spicer sat down beside her, his ruddy features paler than usual, his big hands clasped in front of him.

Cinnaford looked down and saw that they were tense and rigid, and the knuckles showed like white pinpoints against the darker tan of his skin.

Guilder sat between two detectives of the Berkshire police, a white-faced man with grey lips. From time to time he looked around him nervously, as though expecting to be witness to some scene of violence. There was a film of perspiration on his forehead and his hands were trembling.

The tension was rising.

Kelman stopped laughing and looked at McIver. Then he said: "I think that you have taken up enough of our time, McIver. Are you ready to begin?"

There was a little murmur of assent.

McIver came slowly into the centre of the room. "I'll be ready to begin in just a moment more. First, will someone go down and bring up Joseph?"

"Joseph!" said Spicer. They saw him start. "What does Joseph have to do with it?"

McIver smiled grimly. "That remains to be seen. I think that we will have Joseph all the same."

A constable was despatched to fetch the butler, and returned with Joseph, surprised and a little uneasy. It was obvious that the man had not expected the summons, for he looked enquiringly at McIver when he came in.

The inspector nodded.

"Sit down, Joseph."

The man drew in a chair. Spicer said: "Poor fellow, you've scared him, McIver."

Cinnaford chuckled. "Don't worry, Joseph. The inspector has no intention of arresting you. I wish I were as safe as you are."

Someone laughed, but there was no humour in the sound of it. Major Orde cleared his throat. "I think that we should be about ready to begin!"

McIver smiled bleakly.

"If you are—I am. I'm going to speak for a few moments only, gentlemen. Before I begin I am going to tell you this." His voice took on an oddly sinister ring. "*I am staking my professional reputation that Grey Face is in this room!*"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

NOBODY SPOKE!

Chief Inspector Dimm smiled a little more broadly but his big hands went into his pockets. He looked across and observed that a large man was leaning against the door and he noted this with vague approval.

Spicer could only stare. Kelman was watchful, but entirely at his ease. Cinnaford's hands were twitching with suppressed emotion. Guilder had stopped trembling and was looking straight ahead of him at the inspector, and for the moment he seemed the most composed man in the room.

McIver cleared a space on a little table and took a thick envelope from his pocket. He laid it down on the top of the table and then said:

"This case began for me with the murder of Margaret Elter a little more than one week ago. After a preliminary examination of the scene of the murder, Major Orde requested Scotland Yard to take over the case, and Sergeant Bragg and myself were detailed to come to Cinnaford and to carry out investigations.

"An examination of the bullet taken from Miss Elter gave us our first surprise. A ballistic expert at Scotland Yard proved conclusively that this bullet had been fired from a .38 calibre pistol. Furthermore, Sergeant Carmody was able to add one invaluable piece of information. The gun which fired the bullet had been used on at least two other occasions. These occasions were the robbery of Belleami's Bank in Fenchurch Street, where a messenger was killed, and the hold-up of the East Lothian Banker's Trust in Edinburgh, where again a bank messenger was killed. On each of these occasions the robbery had been carried out by a criminal who had used a silk stocking to cover his features and who was known to the police and public alike as Grey Face."

Spicer was leaning forward now, his eyes on those of McIver. Dimm had taken a notebook from his pocket and was jotting something down on it.

Guilder sat still and waited.

The inspector continued:

"Very well, from what I have already said, Scotland Yard has irrefutable proof that Margaret Elter was murdered by the criminal known to us as Grey Face. This was a distinct setback to me, for Grey Face is the one man about whom Scotland Yard knows very little.

"His career began in November 1939. I want every one of you to note that date. Since then, this amazing criminal has succeeded in looting eight banks, and the gross total of his achievement is one hundred and eleven thousand pounds."

There was a little smile flickering on Kelman's face and then in a moment more it was wiped away.

"The officer at Scotland Yard who was in charge of this case was Superintendent Lynd, and Superintendent Lynd is a remarkable man. I have been greatly indebted to him for advice and guidance as the case developed. Unfortunately for Superintendent Lynd, an illness took him away from the Yard at a time when his services would have been invaluable. In his place, Chief Inspector Dimm took charge of the Grey Face bank robberies, and after reading Carmody's report elected to come to Cinnaford to continue, along with me, certain lines of investigation."

Dimm nodded his head as if in confirmation, wetted his pencil and made a heavy black line under what he had written there last.

McIver's jaw was set. He looked around him grimly and continued.

"My first problem was: Who murdered Margaret Elter? The answer to this was Grey Face! My second problem was this: Why was Margaret Elter murdered? This was not to be so easily determined.

"Margaret Elter had only just arrived in this country from New York. She mentioned this fact herself, and routine police investigation corroborated it. Accepting this, I had to determine why she had come to Cinnaford at all.

"This was not difficult, for on her own admission Miss Elter had come to see Mr. Kelman. She stated this fact before Mr. Spicer, Miss Campbell and Lord Cinnaford. She was disappointed when she failed to see him.

"Questioning Mr. Kelman, I found that while Miss Elter had done a considerable amount of work for him, he had only seen the young lady on one occasion. This at any rate was his story!"

Kelman seemed about to speak and then appeared to think better of it. His mouth tightened and he sat back.

Cinnaford looked at him curiously, then turned his eyes to the girl.

Marion Campbell was pale as death.

McIver looked round them all keenly.

"Margaret Elter herself provided a most vital clue to the murder. Possibly the most vital clue of all. This was a powder compact which was left here at Grey Lodge on the afternoon that she called to see Mr. Kelman. I have not seen the compact for the very excellent reason that it was stolen from Miss Campbell's room before she could turn it over to the police.

"In case you may wonder why this compact was stolen, I must tell you that the thief was Grey Face, and that he had the best reason in the world for removing this piece of jewellery. Margaret Elter was a married woman. According to information that I received from the American police, Miss Elter was married in New York in the summer of 1933. Her husband—Mark Sherman—was a man who had been held on suspicion of being implicated in two bank robberies. On both these occasions Sherman was released because there was no evidence strong enough to convict him. Subsequently he met and married Margaret Elter, who left him after a few months of married life. This is important, and I want to emphasize it now. Miss Elter was a girl of sterling character. At no time in her career has she appeared otherwise. From information received, I understand that for the last seven or eight years of her life she has been one of the most trusted agents of Cameron's.

"Cameron's," he looked around him as he spoke, "will not be known to all of you. Most of you, however, will have heard of the very famous Pinkerton's of New York. Cameron's is a firm which stands equally high in reputation and integrity. In fact, for many years Cameron's handled, along with Pinkerton's Agency, a great deal of the American Secret Service work. When I tell you that Miss Elter was one of their most trusted agents you will understand that her character was unimpeachable. How she happened to marry a man

like Sherman I do not propose to explain. Even the most clever of women make mistakes when it comes to affairs of the heart!

"This compact, then, had been given to Margaret Elter by her husband. It was engraved, and the engraving read something like this:

TO MARGARET
FROM HER LOVING HUSBAND
MARK

"Here, then, you have this very vital clue which told us that Margaret Elter was a married woman and that her husband's name was Mark!"

McIver stopped for a second.

"I may say that, at first, suspicion fell on a man who is now dead. That man was Mr. Spicer's chauffeur, Ferguson, and for this reason:

"Ferguson was an ill-natured, surly individual, whose actions invited suspicion. Of all the servants at Grey Lodge, Ferguson alone had been in Margaret Elter's company, for he had driven her from the house to the station. More than that, he had refused information to the police, had been brusque and rude with Mr. Spicer when called to question on a matter of routine, and had generally excited both dislike and suspicion.

"Sergeant Bragg, who saw him first, was convinced that Ferguson had served a term in prison, for the man had certain mannerisms familiar to the old lag. Subsequently investigation proved this to be true, and when police investigation showed that he had served five years for the killing of a policeman it seemed that he was a likely suspect."

There was a little sound. Dimm had dropped his pencil to the floor. He retrieved it and then said: "Who was this policeman?"

"His name was Peter Wilson, and he was Margaret Elter's father."

Dimm frowned portentously. "I'm afraid I don't understand you, McIver, you are talking in riddles."

McIver took a sheet of paper from the envelope on the table.

"This is a copy of Margaret Elter's birth certificate which I received from Somerset House. Her father, Peter Wilson, was a constable on the Ormsby Police Force."

Spicer snapped his fingers and they all looked round at him.

"Say!" The American was excited. "That's correct! Do you remember—the girl told us that her father had been a policeman?"

Cinnaforde whistled. "Yes! Of course she did!"

"In passing, I am going to say this. Peter Wilson married a woman, Dora Baker, and treated her most shamefully. They had one child, Margaret Baker or Wilson. Wilson maltreated and finally deserted his wife, and this was his own undoing. For Dora Baker had had a childhood sweetheart—a man named Fender. Fender had been a soldier and had an excellent Army record. When he heard of this maltreatment he left the Army, came back to England, and met Wilson.

There was a fight, and Wilson received such a beating that he never recovered. Fender was arrested on a charge of manslaughter and was sentenced to five years' penal servitude. That man, James Henry Fender, was known to you as Henry Ferguson!"

He was looking at Marion Campbell now, and he watched her clench her hands.

"It is a sad story," he said slowly. "Ferguson served his five years' imprisonment and came out looking for Dora Baker. I think that he would have married her if he had found her. Unfortunately he did not. Dora Baker had taken her child and had gone to America. And that girl, Margaret Wilson, subsequently changed her name to Margaret Elter by deed-poll. I have not been able to ascertain the reason for this, but it is likely that it would be a mere whim. Possibly her own name was distasteful to her when she heard the story of her mother's life of abuse and misery."

"What happened to the woman?" It was Orde who asked the question.

"She is dead. Strangely enough, she died only a few days ago. I do not think that she lived in America for very long. It is my theory that once her daughter was able to fend for herself she returned to England, and I do know this. She came back to Ormsby and found employment as a dressmaker. About two years ago she fell ill and after a few months she was removed to the Ormsby Hospital suffering from an incurable heart disease.

"She was here when Ferguson found her again. From this time onwards he visited her once a month or so, brought her gifts of flowers, fruit or anything else that he thought she might desire. He also sent the hospital treasurer a cheque for two hundred pounds to cover the accumulated arrears of treatment."

"Two hundred pounds!" said Kelman. "That's a lot of money for a chauffeur, Inspector!"

"Ferguson was more than a chauffeur," said McIver slowly. "I think you know that, Mr. Kelman. He had a sideline. When I examined his papers I found that he had a bank balance of almost thirty-five hundred pounds!"

The Chief Constable looked at him oddly.

"Thirty-five hundred pounds! Can this be true, Inspector?"

"Absolutely, sir. I made enquiries at his bank. Ferguson had opened an account when he was a young man; had added to it during his Army career, but had banked two thousand five hundred pounds within the last year of his life alone. This was particularly interesting to me. How had this man managed to accumulate so large a sum of money?"

"How indeed?" asked Orde dryly.

McIver chuckled.

"That is one of the things we will never know definitely. But I have a theory which fits the facts. I suggest that Ferguson received at least a part of the sum from Grey Face!"

"You mean that they were confederates?"

McIver shook his head.

"I know that they were not. At least not in the general sense of the term. Ferguson, as I told you before, had a sideline. That sideline was profitable. He was paid to do a little quiet spying."

"What?"

The inspector nodded.

"Grey Face for some reason or other felt that he could use Ferguson. I can imagine that this man would be easily prevailed on. He had a naturally dour disposition, and a hatred of the law and all that it stood for. His five years at Dartmoor had soured him. Grey Face found him useful in possibly a variety of ways.

"Ultimately, Ferguson stumbled on to something which enabled him to demand a high rate of payment. Grey Face paid him what he asked—but I am positive that Ferguson never dreamed of the identity of his paymaster until Margaret Elter was murdered. Then he realized the identity of his patron, and he became afraid. I myself tried to induce him to talk, but he refused. Grey Face made two attempts to murder him. On the first occasion I was present. Ferguson was shot at and wounded, and but for my own timely appearance I have no doubt that Grey Face would have finished him off. As it was, he was brought here to Grey Lodge and placed in one of the bedrooms upstairs. While he was here I visited him again and attempted to make him talk. He refused. I think that by this time he felt that he was too deeply enmeshed to escape another term of imprisonment, and this he must have wanted to avoid at all cost.

"While he was lying there, he must have been planning to escape. At the first opportunity, he did so. There was a secret passage connecting Grey Lodge with both Cinnaford Chase and Friar's Hall. Ferguson knew of its existence. At Grey Lodge he was under constant supervision. He decided to leave by this passage, and to make his way to either of these houses, and ultimately to leave the district. He succeeded in reaching the passage, and you are aware of the consequences. He must have met Grey Face, who stabbed him. He had been dead for some time when he was found." He paused for a moment.

"I am not going to criticize this man Ferguson. I am only going to say this. While he did help Grey Face, I doubt if he ever realized, until the murder of Margaret Elter, the man he had to deal with. That, of course, is mere supposition. What I have to say now is fact. Ferguson never knew at any time that Margaret Elter was the daughter of the woman he loved so much. Had he known this one vital fact, this affair might have ended differently." He looked round suddenly.

"Grey Face had two allies at Grey Lodge. Ferguson was one. The other was . . ." He stopped for a second and looked round the room.

The air was tense.

He looked at the mantel clock. Bragg, that most competent of men, could not be far away. He had an idea that the climax would be reached with the arrival of Bragg and his prisoner.

"Go on!" said someone.

McIver looked round.

"First I want you to meet the one man who has met Grey Face face to face. Stand up, Guilder!"

Guilder hesitated and rose to his feet. He stood there for a second and felt the sweep of cold, enquiring eyes rake him.

McIver nodded. "Sit down."

Guilder sat down.

The inspector looked round. "On the night that Margaret Elter was murdered, Guilder was at the 'Grey Man', where he was known as Gordon Woodbridge, and thought to be a commercial traveller. Guilder sat at dinner with Margaret Elter and then left by car for Winchester. For a reason which has no bearing on this case, he returned to Cinnaford. It was a dark, stormy night, and he was not too sure of his way. He was approaching Cinnaford when he saw a figure on the road ahead of him. . . ."

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs.

McIver smiled thinly.

"You can visualize this for yourselves! Grey Face had just shot Margaret Elter. He was moving away, drawing his silk stocking mask from over his head, when a car was on top of him, and he was caught in the headlights."

Cinnaford said thickly:

"What happened then?"

"Guilder stopped the car. He saw a tall, bearded man with a hat in one hand and a silk stocking in the other. He spoke to him—and Grey Face vanished into the darkness. Guilden drove on. He was puzzled for a few moments and then he became desperately afraid of what he had seen!"

He stopped speaking.

There were voices on the landing and among them he recognized that of Bragg. A moment or so passed and the door opened and the little sergeant came in. He looked at the inspector and nodded.

"Bring in your prisoner," said McIver slowly. His eyes were sweeping the room. He saw Spicer tense and Kelman stare round.

Cinnaford rose to his feet, and the inspector waved him down.

Bragg came in. There was a girl with him; a pale, white-faced girl whose eyes were big with fear.

"Mary Hale!" said McIver. There was a crooked little smile on his thin lips.

"Mary Hale is in charge of the post office at Cinnaford. In that capacity she has sole charge of the telephone switchboard at the post office. Since I began to work on this case I have been puzzled by the fact that every move I made seemed to be known to the man I was watching. On one occasion, I myself saw Lord Cinnaford at the post office talking to Miss Hale. Gossip, of course, always centres around a country post office. I thought very little of it at the time, and then it occurred to me that if Mary Hale would talk to Cinnaford, she might talk to anyone."

"When I discovered that this girl of twenty-seven had a banking account of six hundred pounds, I——"

The girl gave a little scream.

"I didn't mean anything, sir! He said he would pay me for what I could tell him . . . I thought it was just animosity. I didn't know."

"You didn't know?"

"No, sir! At first it was Mr. Kelman—and——"

Kelman rose on his feet in an instant.

"Damn you, McIver, I——"

"Sit down!" said McIver.

The big man half turned and then swung round.

A policeman had pushed open the door of the room. He was supporting a man against his shoulder.

"He came down from the upper corridor, sir!" he gasped. "We heard steps and we found him . . . crawling down."

Marion Campbell had given a little cry. In that split second she recognized the man who had terrified her in the wood.

Kelman was across the floor in a bound.

"Muller!"

Muller put his hand up to his shoulder. There was something dark and sticky there.

"Damn him, Mark!" he said. "That guy Harper . . . in the tunnel!"

"What?"

Marion screamed.

The lights went out.

A chair snapped back and then there was a confused babel of sound.

"Damn you!" somebody screamed.

There was the sound of a heavy blow and then Spicer's voice rasped out. "A light! Quickly!"

There was a little click and a white pencil of light that shot across the room. There was a confused struggling mass of men in the centre of the floor.

The girl screamed again and the lights suddenly went on!

The bedraggled Bragg straightened up. There was the light of triumph in his eyes.

McIver chuckled breathlessly.

"Stand up!" he said. "I want you, Mark Sherman, alias Grey Face!"

Kelman lay on the floor. Then he began to laugh.

"So you figured it all out, McIver! You got there first!"

McIver chuckled.

"Surely you don't object to taking a back seat to Scotland Yard, Mr. Cameron?"

Mark Cameron did not answer for a moment. When he did speak it was to the manacled man who lay beneath him.

"Get to your feet, Sherman!"

Selwyn St. David got up very slowly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

"THE FACTS ARE OBVIOUSLY THESE," SAID MCIVER.

It was next morning and he sat with Spicer and Marion Campbell in the comfortable library at Grey Lodge.

"The real Selwyn St. David went out to America when he was about twenty years of age. At that time three people stood between him and the Cinnaford estate. Selwyn St. David was a weakling and soon found his own level. One of his first acquaintances was Mark Sherman. Sherman was of an age with St. David, and was of an entirely different character. He was strong and ruthless and I am certain that he cultivated St. David in the hope of turning this friendship to his advantage.

"St. David died in Yonkers in 1936, and Sherman, who had been with him at the time of his death, seized a golden opportunity. Sherman had taken part in at least two bank robberies, and while the police had not been able to convict him, he knew that he was a marked man.

"St. David had fallen pretty low at the time of his death. He had taken to drugs, and Sherman, who was a pretty far-sighted individual, realized that this debauched and unknown Englishman might be a useful man for his purposes, for the police of more than one State were after Mark Sherman. In the States, these sort of things are more easily managed than in England. Sherman had a death certificate made out for St. David, and he was buried as Mark Sherman. There was no one who might question this. Mark Sherman died and was buried.

"It was not difficult for him to pose as a poverty-stricken young Englishman, and as such he ultimately became a crime reporter with a Detroit newspaper. He was on the staff of this newspaper for some considerable time, and on the whole acquitted himself well. There is one point that I want to bring out. While St. David was with this newspaper, four perfectly planned bank robberies were carried out in the city of Detroit, and none of them was ever successfully solved. A lone gunman had walked into each of these four banks in turn, and had carried out a daring hold-up.

"Two of these banks were protected by the Cameron Detective Agency, and from that time onwards Cameron's were always on his track.

"Two years ago there were a series of disasters in the Cinnaford family, and St. David found himself the sole heir to an earldom. This came at a time when Cameron's Agency was beginning to worry him. He always did play his luck, and on this occasion, with a little good fortune, he might have got away with it.

"There was no danger that he would be recognized. No one in England had ever seen him before. The only remaining members of his family were dead. He came back to Cinnaford just before war broke out, and found himself the heir to a few thousand acres of moorland, grouse shooting and a prodigious debt.

"He settled down to wipe out that debt in his own way. Sherman

was a born criminal. He planned his robberies well in advance, and he carried them out according to schedule. It was probably at this time that he met the man Harper, a crooked private detective, and Harper was a willing tool.

"Unfortunately for him, he made a fatal mistake. One of the banks that he selected was the Third American National Bank, in Fenchurch Street. The Third American National Bank is protected in the United States by Cameron's. When the London branch was robbed, a report of all the circumstances of the robbery was sent to Cameron's New York offices. Here, Mark Cameron himself was interested. Mark Cameron was one of the most able detectives in America, and he himself had been interested in the Detroit bank robberies."

Spicer said with satisfaction:

"There was always something about Mark that I couldn't figure out. I always knew he was a deep one."

McIver nodded.

"Cameron came to England and brought one or two of his men with him. Muller was one. There was another called Sperry. He rented Friar's Hall and cultivated Cinnaford, who was posing as an eligible young English lord.

"Here Cameron, or Kelman, had to be cautious. On the one hand, it was imperative that nothing should occur which would arouse Cinnaford's suspicions. On the other, as an American detective, and a private one at that, he had no authority of any sort in this country. He had to be very careful of every move that he made.

"Ultimately, Cinnaford began to have his suspicions, but by this time a new complication had arisen. He had met Miss Campbell . . ."

The girl nodded. "I can understand," she said quietly. "Daddy is a very wealthy man. He saw most of his problems slipping away, didn't he?"

McIver shook his head.

"You scarcely do yourself justice, Miss Campbell."

He saw colour flood the girl's cheeks.

"It's nice of you to put it like that!"

McIver shook his head. "I told you once before that nobody ever told me I was nice. I'm only being truthful." He leaned forward.

"You will understand the position, then. Cinnaford wished to marry Miss Campbell. Perhaps he loved her; he certainly loved money. Cameron suspected him and watched him like a hawk. Cinnaford was no fool. It was difficult for him to cope with Cameron, but he bribed Joseph to keep an eye on Kelman when he came to Grey Lodge. Unknown to Joseph, he succeeded in enlisting the aid of Ferguson, who was of some considerable use to him. Joseph tells me that Ferguson took long walks when most other people were abed. And I have no doubt where those rambles took him." He smiled a little more broadly.

"Here we have one of those ironical twists. Kelman, too, saw the

value of Ferguson, and he paid the chauffeur to report on Lord Cinnaford's movements, so that Ferguson was running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

"The same was true of Mary Hale. This gossip-mongering young lady was by no means averse to picking up a little easy money. Kelman paid her to talk about Cinnaford's telephone calls. Cinnaford paid her to keep him informed of the movements of the police. It was for this reason that I was greatly handicapped in my earlier investigations. Every call that I made, every line of investigation that I probed, was duly reported to Cinnaford, who paid well for these favours. However, to go back to the murder of Margaret Elter.

"This girl came to Cinnaford to meet Kelman. By an unfortunate chance, Kelman was not at home and she was told by the butler that Mr. Spicer might be able to contact him. She came across here—and so, unwittingly, came to her death.

"Here she met Cinnaford, and it is evident that she recognized Mark Sherman, her husband! You have both mentioned the bad turn that Margaret Elter took here, and which she explained was due to her heart. It was, of course, due to the shock and the fear of Sherman.

"She refused to wait any longer and left in a panic. At the station she presumably changed her mind, and decided to wait and see Cameron and tell him of this new development.

"You can see Cinnaford's dilemma. It was evident that the girl had been unaware of his existence at Cinnaford. It was equally obvious that she had recognized him.. I have no doubt that she was never out of his sight from then on.

"She returned to the village and put up at the 'Grey Man', where she met and talked with Guilder, and then she left for the public telephone kiosk, ostensibly to call Mark Cameron. She never came back. Grey Face murdered her. Peculiarly enough, Guilder saw him a few seconds after the murder was committed, and at that moment Grey Face was wearing a beard. Why he did this I do not know. Possibly to add further to his disguise should he be accidentally seen. Guilder went on his way, a terrified man. Next day I arrested him on another charge, and he admitted in a moment of temper that he had seen Grey Face. It did not occur to me at the time that he had seen him so recently."

He stopped and looked down at them both. "I think that you know the rest, sir. Ferguson soon realized his own danger. If he had spoken to me a great deal of trouble would have been averted. Unfortunately he chose to look after himself. Grey Face murdered him!"

Spicer nodded. "Horrible!" He asked a question and the Yard man looked up sharply.

"That burglary at Cinnaford Chase? That was Mark Cameron. That puzzled me a bit at first, too, but Cameron admitted it. He was looking for Ferguson. Ferguson, as I have said, was taking money from him too. Cameron was sure that Cinnaford had disposed of

him, although he thought that he might be alive. Cameron broke into Cinnaford Chase and spent two hours searching for him. He was fortunate there, for Cinnaford returned unexpectedly and surprised him."

The girl said: "I can see so much now, Mr. McIver. And that man who frightened me—was Muller?"

"Yes. One of Cameron's best men. Cinnaford had Harper, his only real confederate, watching Friar's Hall. You saw Muller knock Harper out, and when you screamed you startled him. He did not know who you were, but he gave chase. I think that when he saw me he realized that you were merely an innocent and accidental onlooker. Harper, by the way, was kept a prisoner in a little hut in the wood, and some time yesterday Cinnaford found him and set him free.

"He had learned from the Hall girl that I had gone to Scotland Yard to see Guilder. Since arrangements were made to bring Guilder to Grey Lodge, Cinnaford was able to make his plans. Harper ambushed the police car at Keppel Keep. If Guilder had been there, he would have been killed. As it was, Harper realized his mistake and made for Cinnaford.

"When Cinnaford saw Guilder along with me, he must have known that his plan had miscarried, and yet he remained as cool as any member of the party. He had given instructions to Harper. The man was to return to Cinnaford Chase and to come to Grey Lodge by means of the tunnel, where he was to create a diversion, should this be necessary.

"As matters would have it, it was necessary. Cinnaford knew that his plan to remove Guilder and myself had collapsed as soon as he saw us at Grey Lodge. For all that, he maintained his composure to the very end. But all the time he knew that Harper was on his way. As soon as the lights went up he would have acted. He would have used the tunnel and made for Cinnaford Chase. A fast car was always kept there in readiness for a quick flight!

"Harper played his part well enough, but Mark Cameron had anticipated this move and had stationed Muller in the tunnel. Unfortunately Muller was wounded, but the wound was not serious enough to prevent him reaching Grey Lodge and giving the alarm.

"Actually, I had anticipated some such move and had three men stationed by the switchboard. Harper only managed to reach it and then he was arrested. There was a scuffle and a shot fired, but nobody was injured."

"Thank heaven for that!" said Mr. Spicer devoutly. "There has been enough bloodshed about this house to last me for the rest of my life. I am leaving it just as soon as I can arrange to get another. Murders! Secret passages!" He made a little sound of disgust.

"The secret tunnel was rather important, sir. Kelman tells me that he suspected its existence, but did not know where it was located. Ferguson, who knew of it, and who used it on several occasions, never spoke of it. I fancy that it was Ferguson whom the maid saw in the corridor. When the house was quiet, he took this opportunity of doing a little exploring on his own."

There was a sound of feet on the stairs. Bragg came in on a mission of goodwill.

"That fellow Kelman is downstairs," he said. "Shall I tell him to come up?"

"Of course."

Mark Cameron came into the room. The big American was grinning. "Well," he said, "I guess this is one of the first times I've been really glad to see you, Inspector. I'll take home a memory of this to the States. Scotland Yard isn't so very far behind the times. You gave me some pretty bad frights."

McIver smiled crookedly.

"And you deserved 'em. I must say you're an enterprising man, Cameron. You've broken the law of this land of ours on a score of occasions recently. You're lucky you didn't get five years for it."

"If it had been left to Chief Inspector Dimm, I'd have been hanged," said the American. "It's a good thing I've got a friend or two at court." He shrugged his big shoulders. "Muller is coming on fine. They can't kill that boy. In the burg he comes from they had to shoot an old man to start a cemetery."

Spicer chuckled.

"We're pretty tough fellows," he said complacently. "Wait until this war is over. We'll have shown 'em all just how tough we can be."

Mark Cameron nodded.

"When things get quieter," he said, "I'll be pleased to see you in New York, McIver. I'll show you around."

The inspector laughed.

"There's not much likelihood of that, Cameron. Scotland Yard doesn't pay by results!"

"If it did," said Bragg, modestly, "I'd be a well-off man. As it is, I've got to live off my public."

McIver looked around at Spicer.

"If you'll excuse me, sir, I've got something else to attend to now. I want just a word with your local inspector, and I rather fancy he's in the kitchen with Joseph."

He went out and walked down the long corridor, and queerly enough he knew in his heart that this was one case which he was going to be sorry to leave. Ever since he had come here he——

He heard someone say:

"Hello."

Marion Campbell was standing on the stairway just above him. He felt the colour come into his cheeks.

"Oh—hello. I thought that you were—I mean I left you in the room with the rest of them——"

She nodded.

"Yes, I came out. I ran up the old stairway and came down this way. Aren't you a little bit glad to see me?"

McIver drew a long breath, and grinned.

"Yes—I'm—I'm jolly glad to see you——"

And then she laughed.

